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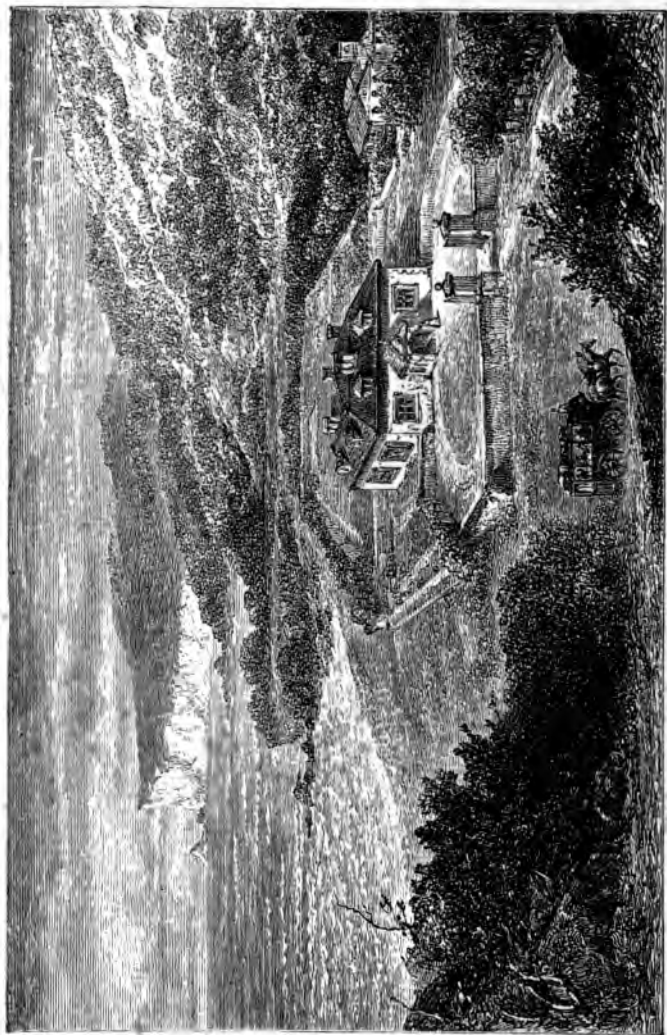
THE
CHILDREN'S ISLE

BY
ELIZA METEYARD



THE CHILDREN'S ISLE.





THE GRANGE.—p. 29.

1871

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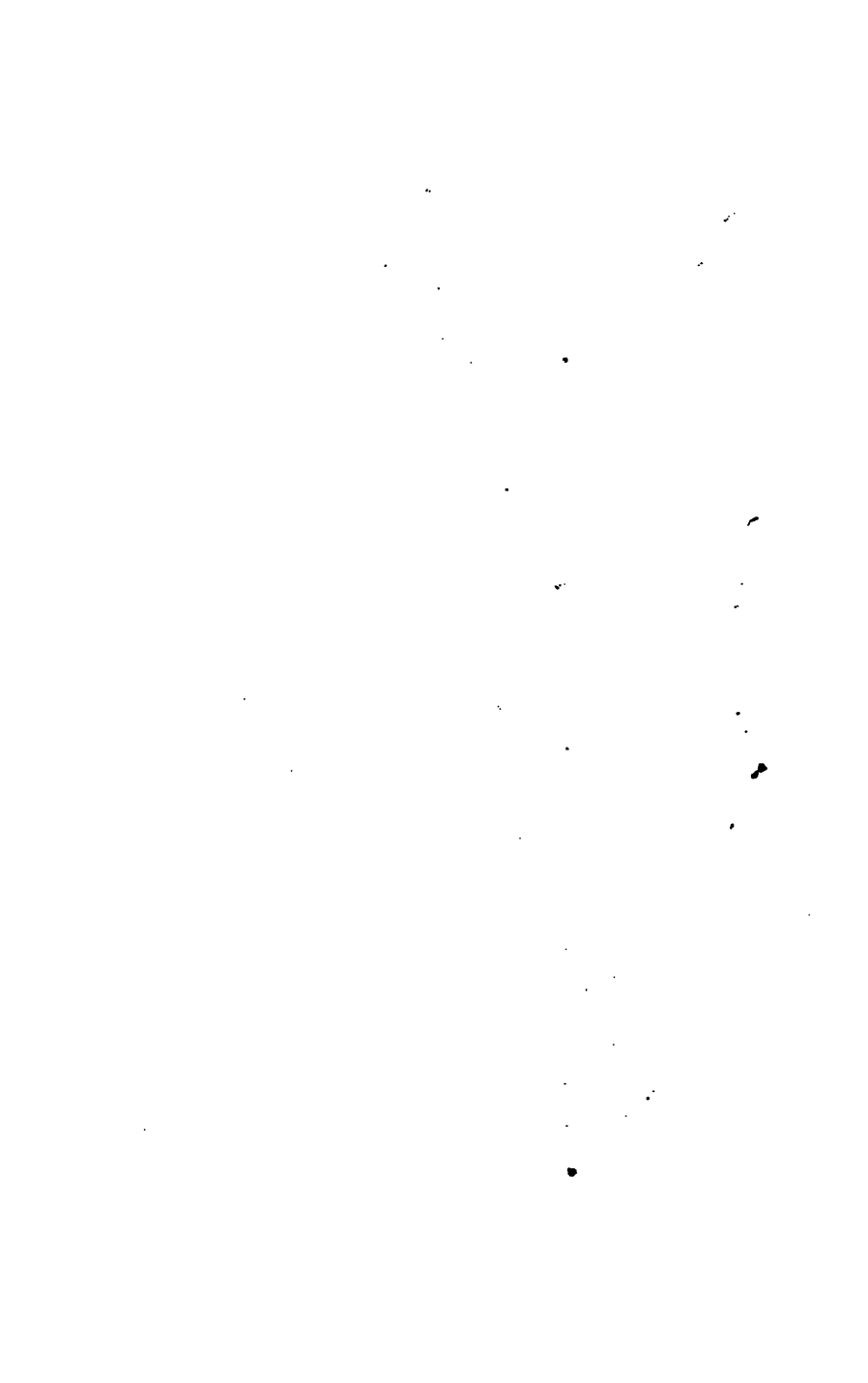
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THE
CHILDREN'S ISLE:

A Story for the Young.

BY

ELIZA METEYARD,

AUTHOR OF "THE DOCTOR'S LITTLE DAUGHTER," "LILLIAN'S GOLDEN HOURS,"
"DORA AND HER PAPA," ETC., ETC.

WITH FIVE FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS.



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PREFACE.

IN the *Times* newspaper, some thirty years ago, appeared an advertisement for a governess in the extreme west of Ireland. An accomplished widow lady, with children who could accompany her, would be preferred; and to this was added, "The place is lonely in the extreme." This advertisement suggested to me the idea of the following story—long cherished, but only now accomplished. The beautiful coast scenery of western Ireland seemed to offer many subjects capable of being worked up into those picturesque details and adventurous incidents so suited to the romance-loving period of adolescence.

The person and character of Lord Donore are derived from facts. The last Lord Montrath, of the Irish peerage—at whose death, probably about the end of the last century, the title became extinct—is said to have been as hideously deformed as the imaginary Lord Donore. With gifts less intellectual and artistic than those I have bestowed, Lord Montrath possessed considerable capacity and most humane and generous

feelings. If I am rightly informed, he left by will a considerable sum ; the interest to be yearly expended in the purchase of an additional allowance of coals to the twenty-six aged gentlewomen resident at the Hospital of Preston-on-the-Weald Moors, near Wellington, Shropshire : as testified to by Her Majesty's Commissioners, one of the best conducted Charities in Midland England. It owes its foundation, in about 1723, to the famous line of the Herberts of Chirbury. The strange mystery of Lord Donore's existence I have, I hope, effectively worked out, to the implanting and practice of the higher moral principles ; while the little crowd of animal life, which, as customary, surrounds my group of happy and inquiring children, are not brought upon the scene without a purpose : moral in practice—and more remotely scientific.

E. M.

July, 1878.

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THE CHILDREN'S ISLE.

CHAPTER I.

TOWARDS THE WEST.

1 HALF-PAST EIGHT o'clock, or rather more, on a fine spring morning, the express train to Chester all but ready, and the departure platform at the Euston Square station of the North-Western railway crowded to excess, made the scene and beginning of this little history. Preceding two large trucks, 1 1/2 piled with boxes, packing-cases, bags and bundles of every conceivable shape and kind, went as briskly as might be a young lady and two girls ; the former leading by a stout chain, and with the greatest watchfulness, an Isle of Skye terrier of exceeding beauty. In the wake of the trucks followed a stout, hearty-looking boy, and a young servant. She was very pretty, and probably Irish, for her eyes were dark and glowing, though her general appearance was that of one whose lot was, at least for the present, cast among needy people. With one hand she held the boy, in the other she carried an old wicker cage mended up with window-cord, in which was a fine black cat. There were unmistakable signs that puss had at first struggled hard to release himself from his temporary prison ; but finding his efforts in vain, he

had resigned himself to his fate, and now, with his fine tail twisted prettily round his feet, sat motionless and silent, though occasionally, when his prison got a more than ordinary shake from the hurry of the passing and repassing crowd, he renewed his scratching and dismal howls. But his bearer held to his prison stoutly ; and taking good-temperedly the chaff of the porters and passers-by as to the cat and its journey, followed on towards the luggage-van. Here the lady carefully superintended the stowage of packing-cases and easels, boxes and bags ; and then, stooping to her pretty favourite, gave her a last caress, as she resigned her to the guard.

"Be good, Lu-fy," she said ; "you will see Missy again by-and-by. Sweet days are coming to all of us. Rabbits and runs, hills, valleys, rocks, and lakes, sunshine, green turf, and flashing seas. Good-bye, good-bye."

The children then hastily caressed the pet, for the guard was impatient and time short ; and a minute later she was securely fastened in a loose horse-box, wherein also was placed puss and his prison. It was evident that Bob had been a friend and companion of the weary girl, for on looking her last she began to cry.

"There, don't be a muff, Biddy, and cry in that way. Everybody's looking at you." And the boy, as he whispered this, dropped her hand and retraced his steps towards the middle of the train, where the lady and the girls, attended by another guard, were seeking places in a comfortable second-class carriage.

"And shure, Masther Arthur, won't I be missing the darlint upstairs and downstairs, and at night in the kitchen, when I've nobody wid me but the beetles, and long hours to sit for the lodgers coming in ? The pritty crethur——"

Biddy had to end her soliloquy abruptly, for the carriage doors were being shut, and the train about to start. One

door was however kept open, and kindly hands held forward to touch hers in a last farewell.

"Good-bye, Biddy," they all said at once. Then the sweet gentle voice of the lady was heard alone. "Good-bye, dear faithful soul, best of nurses, and kindest of humble friends. Be sure I shall never forget you, come what may. I will send you word of our safety—even to Lufy and Bob——"

"Be shure you send the letther to the greengrocer's, dear lady," interrupted Biddy, "for if the dragon, Misthress Gunn, gets hold of it, why——"

"I will take care, Biddy. You shall hear of us in some safe fashion ; and now——"

There was another hand-shake, a kiss of the children, and the train sped on, leaving the weeping girl to drop back on to an adjacent seat, and give full vent to her passionate tears.

They were ebbing, and she was about to rise, when a sauntering porter stopped and spoke.

"Crying for that young lady, eh? Was she your mistress?"

"No ; but a dear lady."

"She looked so ! Married, eh?"

"Oh yes. A widdy."

"A widow !" repeated the inquisitive porter. "Why, she looks hardly old enough to be a wife. And those children ! they cannot be hers. The elder girl must be more than twelve."

"Miss Freda is just on her thirteen, an' a swate darlint. No ! they're Misthress Hexham's husband's naxis an' neffu. They only came out o' Wales awhile ago."

"But they're gone with the lady now to—to——" hazarded the inquisitive porter.

"Yes ; they're gone wid Misthress Hexham right across the say to ould Ireland, and over the counthry to the say agin. A mighty lonely place it is." Then Biddy, considering

probably that she had imparted enough of Mrs. Hexham's affairs, or recollecting perhaps her manifold duties at home—the lodgers' dinners, the lodgers' beds, the myriad ceaseless wants of a middle-class London lodging-house—rose with a sigh to go, and with a civil "good-morning" presently went.

The fair morning led on to a glorious day. A day when April was in its prime; when far away landscapes looked lovely in their garniture of fresh and vivid green; and those nearest still lovelier, with tufts of primroses in the hollows, the pale stars of the celandine in the hedgerows, the scented cowslips decking the open, and the scarcely budded harebells wherever the copse or brake gave shadows. The eager children looked forth from the windows as though they could not feast their eyes enough; and the lady, who had been much longer pent up in the town than they, was still, if more quietly, enraptured with the freshness of nature and the glory of the April morn.

Occasionally the children spoke to each other; and this they could do unreservedly, as they had a compartment of the carriage to themselves. But now the elder girl, moving from the further window to the lady's side, said gently,—

"Aunt Edith, we——"

The lady raised her finger, and with a gentle smile said, "Mamma, you know! You mustn't forget."

"And I oughtn't, mamma—we oughtn't to forget it," replied Freda, nestling to her. "You have been a real one to us—as good as our own mamma could have been."

"One of the conditions," interrupted Mrs. Hexham, "of this strange engagement to go so far, and to a place so lonely, is this: that candidates applying should be widow ladies with children,—children who could accompany the candidate selected to the remote part of Ireland where the appointment lay, and join in the studies and amusements of the two boys and one girl it would be her duty to teach.

My engagement was as much a surprise as it is still a mystery to me. My kind physician first saw the advertisement, and then mentioned it ; and I suppose—there being few candidates—he must have written some flattering account of me to this Dr. Marlow, whose niece and two nephews I am to teach. Dr. Glanville mentioned, at my request, that you, Arthur, and Iole were not exactly my children ; and the answer kindly was, that so some intelligent well-behaved children could accompany me, it really did not matter. And thus, needing rest and change after my severe illness, and the same change being likely to benefit you children, as well as free me, in some measure, from the heavy charge of your keep and education, and which the little I have from the estate of your dead relation scarcely meets, I accepted the post for a time, and am thus journeying with you to the western shores of Ireland."

"It is a great delight, mamma—a charming thing ! Iole and I can never forget the joy we had when you came to Sydenham and took us from school ; and Arthur says the same, though he so liked some of his schoolfellows."

"He may come to like his new ones as well."

"Oh, I daresay, mamma ; and Iole and I like the girl too. We have been wondering what her name is ; and what sort of places Lough Morr and Castle Morr are."

"A few hours, and all will be known to us."

"If the house be dreary, it cannot be worse than the old tanner John Hexham's was," chimed in Arthur. "You're a trump card, Aunt Edith ; but *he*, though our mother's uncle and your husband, was——"

"Arthur," interrupted Mrs. Hexham gravely, "I have repeatedly asked you never to refer to him. Why do so, when you know how it annoys me?"

"Well, auntie, we have all of us no reason to remember the dismal, sour-faced, precise old miser. One thing, how-

ever : you came to us through him, and you are good—jolly good. So, like the girls, I'll be well-behaved, say no more of the dead tanner or his favoured company, and call you Edith, if not 'mamma.' So give me a kiss, and with it buns and oranges."

Edith kissed the hearty, wilful, noble boy, and bidding him produce a basket from beneath the seat, soon divided a part of its contents between him and his sisters. When this, in addition to various packets of sweets, had been eaten, the two eldest, Freda and Arthur, began a long discussion as to how they should amuse themselves in the wilderness to which they were bound ; and little Iole, tired already by her journey and the early hour at which she had risen, lay down on the cloak-and-shawl-covered seat, and resting her pretty face on Mrs. Hexham's lap, soon fell into a long and profound sleep, which was not broken till they reached Chester at noon. Mrs. Hexham meanwhile sat lost in thought, or in gazing on those fair scenes of midland England, through which the train speeded as an arrow from its bow.

At Chester they changed carriages ; and here poor sorrowful Lufy was delighted to see her mistress, and to be fed and caressed. But puss—sulky, and resigned apparently to some dreadful fate—lay curled up like a snake in winter time. Towards evening the travellers reached Holyhead, and crossing the Irish Channel that night, were in Dublin early next morning. From thence, after a few hours' rest and refreshment, they journeyed westward by railway so far as it went ; and this terminus being connected with a small town, they stayed for the night at an inn whence started a coach called the Shamrock, and by which they had to go a further journey of thirty miles.

The Shamrock in its brighter days had been a nobleman's chariot. It was swung high above the wheels, its windows

were of plate glass, and a little of its gilding and original mulberry-coloured paint remained. But all else was changed. The coachman's box had been enlarged, as had also the rumble, in order to accommodate passengers.

The inside was considered to hold six fair-sized persons ; but if one or two of them chanced, as it occasionally happened, to be bulky, there was more squeezing than was consistent with comfort. The original gold lace and fine cloth covering had been replaced, in parts, with green baize, now much faded and worn ; and the nails which held the tatters together were large enough, here and there, to accommodate a bag, a basket, or a hat. Without the vehicle the traces were mended with rope, but the horses were lively, young, and well fed, and prepared, as it seemed, to take the road with spirit.

Fortunately Mrs. Hexham and her little company were the only travellers who had much luggage ; for the cases, the boxes, and other goods she had brought with her, not only covered the roof, but had to be piled up and kept in safety by a stout rope ; whilst smaller things, such as bags and baskets, were tied to the rumble and to projections elsewhere. Bob, still in the old cage, crowned the great pile ; but Lufy, now released from her chain, and what she probably considered cruel imprisonment in a railway van, leapt into the coach even before her mistress, as though resolved to be separated no more.

There were two or three outside passengers, and one within—a melancholy-looking, ill-clad youth, with a few books in a wallet swung across his shoulders ; but before the last outskirts of the straggling town merged wholly into the country, the guard, who was a ragged lad of not more than fourteen, blew a shrill blast on his long horn, and the smart driver drew up his horses in front of a pleasant country house, from which emerged a well-dressed, middle-aged gentleman.

After a tender leave-taking of a lady and some little children, he took his place inside the coach, and the smart driver, relighting his short pipe, drove on.

The new-comer, after a keen survey of Mrs. Hexham, the children, and the poor youth—who, wrapt in melancholy thought, heeded no one—opened a conversation by inquiring from the lady if she had ever been in Ireland before. She briefly replied “No.”

“Then you will see many things which are new, and much lovely scenery.”

“I have already seen much which I admire.”

“I am an Irishman,” the gentleman replied; “and I thank you. We only want more admirers, and a majority of them to stay among us, to be a prosperous nation. The lady from whom you saw me part not half an hour ago is a case in point. She is my wife’s sister, and the widow of a clergyman who, cut off suddenly by fever, left her poor and with a large family. Some distant connexions offered her the house you saw, and a considerable estate connected therewith, if she would come to Ireland and farm it. She was a woman of spirit, and accustomed to a country life; so she gladly accepted the offer, and engaging a farm bailiff of good ability, who knew all the best systems of English tillage, she came here some five years ago, and has succeeded admirably. She and her bailiff send the best cattle—for it is mainly a stock and grazing farm—and the best dairy produce and poultry to the market; and thus she, who was so poor as to be barely able to support her eight children, is now sufficiently well off to send the two eldest sons to Trinity College, Dublin, and her eldest daughter to Edinburgh for their education, and to keep a governess for those at home.”

“As the class of useful women enlarges,” replied Mrs. Hexham, “every country will be benefited.” Then, after a pause, she added, as she pointed with her hand through the

open window, "The scenery appears to me to grow wilder and wilder."

"Wild as it is, it is scarcely a specimen of Ireland's solitudes. Westward, beyond the village where this coach ends its journey, stretches a region that has not its parallel in England—scarcely in Ireland : a region that was once in parts densely populated, but famine swept through it, and emigration completed the work. With the exception of a very few thinly-peopled fishing villages at great distances along the coast, and here and there a cluster of mud cabins in the more hilly parts of the bogs, a traveller might journey for miles without seeing a living soul. This state of things is being slowly remedied, for those who buy and farm encumbered estates, or embark in mining or fishing schemes, bring almost always English or Scotch labourers. But your journey surely ends where this coach does? Mine does not extend so far by five miles. I am a linen manufacturer ; and having left home on a little tour for my health, I have come thus far to see some mines in which I have an interest. But you?"

"I go more than twenty miles beyond the point where the coach stays," was the lady's reply.

"Why, that will bring you to the Atlantic ocean,—to the wildest region of loughs, rocks, and mountains."

"I am prepared for great wildness and solitude."

"Prepared!" exclaimed the gentleman: "you cannot realize it."

"I can," was the quiet answer. "I have lived long in a vast city, knowing no living soul but a few co-workers and a few teachers ; and there I have seen and felt a solitude surpassing anything which nature can offer : of this I am sure. To nature we seem to belong, for she shares with us all her benefits. But man failing to recognize us, our desolation is extreme."

"This is true ; but it is an evil which higher culture, on every side, will go far to ameliorate. May I ask, more from interest in the welfare of a stranger than curiosity, whither you are bound?"

"The place is called Lough Morr, or variously Castle Morr. Do you know it?"

"I have heard of Castle Morr—beautifully situated on some lakes of that name. I think it, and a wide surrounding country, belong to a very old Irish family of the name of Clare. But I thought they were absentees. The title of Earl Clare is extinct ; but there were daughters, and some of these may be alive. One married an English peer, but she died."

"I know nothing of this name, nor have I anything to do with Castle Morr. My residence is to be at a grange or farmhouse by the sea ; and I go to teach a niece and two nephews of a Dr. Marlow, whose brother dying in India, he came to be guardian to them. My children here will be their schoolmates and playfellows."

"Your children !" exclaimed the gentleman, as every one else did who heard this assertion ; and he glanced at Arthur, Ethelfreda and Iole Betton, and then at the sweet young face of Edith Hexham.

She smiled. "Though young, I have been married, and am now a widow. Their mother's uncle was my husband. They have been now more or less under my care and direction for four years ; and thus for many reasons—their genuinely good natures, their orphanhood and friendlessness among others—they have become very dear to me. Many mothers hold the natural title with far less love. Indeed, in every sense I am their mother, for on earth they have no other." And as she spoke Edith's fostering arm gathered Freda and Iole towards her.

The stranger was more and more interested. "Well, with

six children you will have enough to employ you. But you know they cannot always be in school ; and out of it children are kings rather than subjects, and care for nothing but one another's company. I am a father, and know this well."

"But this will just suit me," said Edith. "Whilst they play I can work."

"Work ! what work ? Excuse me. The chapter in life you open intensely interests me."

"I am an artist."

"An artist ! And so am I, after a manner—thus kin draws kin. My father, brother, and I are jointly the largest linen manufacturers in Ireland. Our name is Desmond ; and my department is that of designing and superintending the production of patterns. Thus I have been led to many artistic sources, and take great interest in all."

"And all have interest to the true artist. An exquisite design upon a table-cloth is, in its way, as much a thing of beauty as a painting on a vase, or the carving on a cathedral screen."

"I am heartily glad you think so. You paint, then ?"

"Yes ; both figure and landscape. But my tastes lie more especially towards sculpture. I model more than I paint. But where I am going I fancy I shall have to reverse my liking. Objects and materials may be wanting for the one ; for the other—for landscape especially—there will be a new and infinite nature open to me. And this is what I thought of when broken health and consequent need of change led me to accept, for a time, a new life in a strange country."

"And wisely, I think and hope."

The coach, which for some miles had been traversing the post-road of a wild and solitary country—vast tracts of unenclosed bog, varied by mountains, lying on either side—now stayed to change horses, at a spot where several roads met. A mud cabin, a long dilapidated shed—probably a

stable—and a huge pile of turf, with a smaller one of faggots, filled up an angle formed by some horse-tracks leading from the hills; and here the relay of horses, young and fresh, though unkempt, stood ready. The ostler was an ill-clad, ruffianly-looking fellow. Four or five others, much like him, though if possible more fierce and ruffianly in aspect, lounged about the door of the cabin, which, from a rude sign dangling from the thatch, was evidently a wayside inn. They were smoking and drinking as well, for glasses and coarse earthen mugs were scattered on a bench at hand. This, at one end, served also as a seat to a man of higher grade and better dress. He was smoking a cigar, and evidently waiting for the coach, for as soon as he saw its approach in the distance, he drank off the contents of a glass just brought from the interior of the cabin by a woman, and hurriedly rising, followed her within. He strode across it to a recess in a darkened corner, where on a rude bed lay a child of about seven years old, in a profound sleep.

“Kathie” (pronouncing the *ka* long), he said, as he shook her somewhat roughly, “wake up: the coach is come. You’ll soon be back with the old avourneen.”

He had to arouse her again and repeat his words before the little sleeper fully woke. Then, as she sat up and he lifted her quickly in his arms, she replied, in a *patois* half Irish, half English, “Father, I like Aunt Agnes, but I like the avourneen best. I won’t go away any more.”

“But Aunt Agnes gives Kathie pretty clothes, and would be so sorry if she did not see her dead sister’s little daughter sometimes. Here, Nan! tie on the child’s hat: there is not a minute to lose!”

Hearing these words, one of three women gathered about the peat fire hurried forward to assist. Whilst she smoothed the child’s ruffled but extremely beautiful black hair, and tied on her hat, the gentleman—for such he seemed to be, though

dissipated-looking and prematurely aged—gathered up some coats, a riding whip, a brace of handsome pistols in a holster, a little deal box and wicker basket, and giving these to a man he called “Dan,” hurried with the child to the coach. Here opening the door, he placed her on the only vacant seat, and prepared to go. She perceived his intention, and as he closed the door she began to scream and struggle forward.

“Whisht, Kathie !” he said, in a tone which struck Mrs. Hexham’s ear as stern and savage in the extreme. “I shall be here outside. Whisht ! or I’ll keep you longer on the road.”

He said this in a broken *patois* of Irish and English, though intelligible enough to those who saw the angry gesture of his threatening hand. Then banging to the door, he clambered to a front seat, and the fresh horses galloped on.

Terrified at being among so many strangers, the child renewed her screams and struggles. Mr. Desmond, who had heard her Christian name, addressed her by it, and spoke in the broken tongue the man had done.

“Kathie, don’t cry. All are friends here.”

His gentle tone of voice soothed her instantly. She ceased to struggle towards the door, and turning her pretty, tear-wet face, looked wistfully at the gentleman.

“Yes ; all are friends here to little girls. These young ladies will be good to you, I’m sure. Dry your tears ! The horses go quick, and the stage is not a long one.”

As though to give effect to his words, the children, after a word with Mrs. Hexham, produced cakes and sweets from a basket, and loaded her hands ; and whilst she ate, and listening to the pretty sisters’ whispered talk, returned their smiles, Arthur brought forth a small deal box from beneath the seat. Unlocking it, it was seen to contain books—a

miscellaneous medley—such as children are wont to gather together when going away far from home, for there were dictionaries and grammars, books of arithmetic, geography and history, tales, puzzles, and songs ; even down to the toy books of his early days.

“Edith,—mamma !” he whispered, “we are ashamed of “Puss in Boots,” “Tom Thumb,” “Jack the Giant Killer,” “Mother Hubbard,” and a lot more. May I give her some?”

“Yes, it will be kind of you. When we were packing, and I saw you putting them in the box, I wondered.”

Arthur, thus encouraged, sorted his childish books from among the rest, and whilst doing so, threw down many of his school-books, with a boy's usual carelessness, on such empty places as were around. Thus some fell on the floor, others covered a few vacant inches on the opposite seat, between Freda and the melancholy-looking youth, and a few he put on Edith's lap. Then gathering together his gifts, he piled them in the child's hands, and opening them one by one, went through their pretty comedies of Mother Hubbard, Bluebeard, Jack the Giant Killer, and the rest. This to the child's great wonder and delight,—for though timid and silent, strangely wild and artless in her looks and manner, as though reared away from her kind amidst the solitude of nature, soft words had evidently a magical effect in attracting and winning her attention.

Whilst this proceeded, the country of waste and bog had given place to one of hills and rocks ; and at a point where a pass opened into their wilder intricacies, a shout ahead was heard, and a moment after, the driver reining in his horses, an Irish car was seen waiting beside the road, in which was a man wearing the appearance of an agent or superior workman. Mr. Desmond, who had been keeping a look-out for some time previously, hearing the shout of inquiry, thrust his head out of the window, and hailing the

man, bade the coach stop. He then, hurriedly gathering up his coats and travelling bag, prepared to go.

"Good-bye, lady," he said to Mrs. Hexham, as he proffered his hand: "this is the first, but I trust it is not the last time we shall meet. Remember, if you ever come near Limerick, William Desmond, the linen manufacturer, has a home to offer you and a wife to welcome you; and in the solitudes of Castle Morr it may not be amiss to recollect that there is an Irishman on Irish soil who will serve you if he can. I am a practical man, so send to me if any need, however trivial, should present itself." Thus saying, and bidding the children a hasty good-bye, he hurried to the car, and soon was lost with it in the shadows of the mountain pass.

The coach, keeping for a time a more level road, began at length to slowly climb a mountain steep, from whence at the top the shimmering sea and its rugged rockbound coast were just visible. After an equally long descent the coach reached a picturesque glen, broken by rocks, and a wild growth of the arbutus tree. Here it drew up, and Kathie's father descending, opened the door, and roughly bade her come.

She was a picture to see, as he thus broke upon her childish happiness. Freda had taken off her hat, so that her elf-like locks of dark hair fell in a rich entangled mass about her face. Her large gleaming eyes were bent upon the book, of which Arthur turned the pages, and Iole helped him to explain. Her delight was at its height, for the comedy of Mother Hubbard was just at that point where

"She went to the tailor's
To buy him a coat,
And when she came back
He was shaving the goat."

And as it happened that Kathie had not only goats but

dogs in such home as was hers, and was accustomed to the service of an old woman in a red cloak, her recognition was accurate and her joy extreme.

"See, see!" she cried, "the old avourneen! Snap, and Jessy, and Shavy."

"Come, Kathie, come! Mick and the pony are waiting." Thus saying, the rough man leant forward, and lifting the child in his arms, scarcely allowed her time to gather up her pretty gifts. But the children aided, and so she was borne away, the books hugged in her arms as though very precious, and her sweet wistful face turned intently towards the strangers who had been so kind to her. The children watched her departure eagerly, and crowding to the door, saw her borne some little distance to the shadow of a beetling rock, where stood a rough-coated, broad-backed pony, and a half-clad shoeless lad. She was then put upon the pony, and the man, as though in a hurry, set off at once. Whether he spoke to or moved the child roughly, or whether she was grieved to leave strangers who had been so kind to her, those watching from the coach could hear her crying as the pony climbed a wild steep hill in the direction of the sea.

The smart driver had alighted, as also the lad who acted as guard; and as, like those in the coach, they watched the group climb the hill, they spoke together in whispers. In a moment more the driver came and closed the door.

"A rough-looking man that," said Mrs. Hexham. "Do you know him, coachman?"

"No, my lady: but his looks and spache are no passport."

"Indeed they are not. He looks fierce enough and rough enough for brigand or smuggler."

"He may be the last, my lady, for aught I know. The wild sayshore twenty miles or so away is said to be a busy place with fellows such as he. Many a keg they bring on

shore, and lace, gloves, and other wearables. Many a wild cave is full of things fit for princes."

The driver did not stay for a rejoinder, for he was within three miles of the little township at which the coach ended its journey. So, having no further time to spare, he touched his hat, and climbing the box, soon urged his horses into their accustomed rapid pace.

Resuming her seat, Edith's attention was soon attracted by the poor pale melancholy-looking youth, who, having taken up one of the volumes Arthur had thrown carelessly on the seat beside him, was so utterly lost in its contents as to be as oblivious to those around him as though they were miles away. The book, as Edith knew by the cover, was a Latin one—a history by Cæsar or Tacitus—for Arthur had been reading to her from some such work not long before; and thus she guessed that the poor melancholy youth was a scholar. Arthur, busily repacking his box, looked flushed and angry at the liberty taken, and with the rude thoughtlessness of boyhood seemed about to demand the book; but a gesture from Edith restrained him. Unconsciously the youth read on, not seeing the kindly face of the lady or the half-angry glances of the boy.

The hills had now given place to a wide strath or vale, in the midst of which lay a lake of some extent, bordered by pastures and fields rich in springing flax, potatoes, and grain. As it was nigh noon when the coach began its journey, the day was now on the wane, so that the sinking sun lay spread in glory over a wide breadth of the tranquil valley. At its head, a mile away, were presently seen the roofs of the little township; and when these came in sight, the guard blew lustily on his horn. Its shrill notes echoing through the valley caught the youth's ear, and aroused from his deep abstraction, he looked up and around. His eye and that of Mrs. Hexham met. Blushing deeply, and stammering out

a few words of half-audible apology, he laid the book in the place from whence he had taken it with a trembling hand. The deep sigh as he did so, and the look of melancholy regret, touched a tender chord in Edith's heart.

"I beg pardon, I'm sure : I—I——" he stammered again, when he caught a fresh glance of Edith's kindly eye.

"Pray don't apologize," she said ; "I am too much a borrower and reader of books myself to criticise others. You read Latin, I see, and are a scholar."

The youth blushed deeply again. "I have been a student in Dublin University for six months ; but——"

"But what ?" asked Edith, finding he hesitated.

"I could stay no longer, my lady. To live I sold my books and my clothes, but they came to an end ; and so I'm now returning to herd cattle, plough, and hoe. The Lord help me ! My mother's a poor widdy, and no letter has come from California for many a month. Whilst Ambrose sent the money, things went a'sy, my lady, but——"

"Poor youth !" said Edith ; "I pity you, for I have known only too well the struggle against adverse circumstances. Pray, if they will be a comfort to you and assist you, take all the Latin books, and the one or more that there is of Greek. They are this young boy's school-books, but I doubt not at the place to which we are bound we shall find others. If not, what we need can be ordered from England."

And as she spoke she helped Arthur to sort out the elementary books and dictionaries, adding thereto a few volumes of the best English prose and verse. The studious youth placed them in his wallet with boundless thanks, and the light of a new life shone in his eyes.

"I may be a schoolmaster now," he said exultingly, as though to himself, "and tache, and have a school, and help the old mother and the sisters. Heaven bless you, lady ! May we meet again."

"Perhaps we may ; and it will be easier when we meet, if I know your name."

"Terence Foyle, my lady."

The coach had now dashed into the little township or village ; and the guard, blowing a last tiralirala upon his horn, was ready to descend the moment the coachman drew rein. This he did in front of a very decent inn, on the doorstep of which stood a comely hostess, who, as soon as Edith alighted, advanced towards her and invited her within.

"Everything's made ready for your ladyship's male," she said, as she dropped a continued succession of curtseys : "the Dochter Marlow ordered it a wake ago ; and a coach is to be here presently for your ladyship and the children,—so please walk in."

Mrs. Hexham did so, to find that rooms had been prepared for her of a degree of comfort and respectability not often found in so remote a district. All of them were warmed by peat fires, and in the parlour was spread a comfortable meal.

When she and the children had removed the soil of travel, and returning to the room sat down to the table, she remarked to the mistress, who had just brought in a tray, that it was very kind of Dr. Marlow thus to provide for their comfort ; and then she hazarded a question as to whether the mistress knew him.

"I've sane him once or twice, me lady ; and he's a nice gentleman, though no great talker."

"Do you know anything of the place where he lives ?"

"But little, me lady. It's wild and lonely, wid but one village and a few scattered cabins for miles and miles. Many of the cabins ain't fit to live in, for the famine ran through the counthry like fire, and desolated it." And the woman, as though wishful to be questioned no further, took up her tray and left the room.

Just as the meal was finished a carriage drove up to the door. It was not the ordinary Irish car, but a large fourgon or waggonette, such as may be constantly seen in the west end of London, or in the vicinity of rich noblemen's seats in the country. It is a carriage used mostly for the conveyance of luggage to and from railway stations; and having movable seats, is also serviceable for passengers. The fourgon, thus at the door, was of the handsomest kind; and a servant in livery, who sat beside the coachman, alighting, delivered a note, which was immediately brought in to the stranger lady. It was a brief line from Dr. Marlow, to the effect that, if not too fatigued, she had better complete her journey that night; but if otherwise, the carriage would await her convenience.

Although she and the children were very weary, Edith thought it best to proceed without delay. So as soon as possible they resumed their outer clothing, and took their places in the waggonette; for, as the landlady said the bill of entertainment would be settled by Dr. Marlow, nothing remained but to give her a gratuity and bid her a civil good-bye. The servants had brought numerous rugs and wraps: with these they covered up the travellers warmly; then piling the luggage, drove away.

The sun had set, and the darkness of approaching night had increased during the hour they rested in the inn; but the moon rose, and its light grew as they proceeded. Slowly ascending from the valley towards a barrier of rocky hills, they were soon amid their deep solitudes. Thickets of arbutus and alder, birch and dwarf oak, clothing the hollows and often descending into lower levels, assumed the proportion and look of dense woodland. The scenery was further varied by small valleys covered with the greenest turf, by brooks, mountain pools, and descending springs, which were occasionally waterfalls of great beauty and power.

The horses had a toilsome journey, but the coachman was patient and did not hurry them. At length, at a great altitude, they reached level ground, and proceeding some miles across its solitudes—for neither cabin nor living thing was to be seen—they reached a gorge between two hills, and as this ended the wide ocean and its rockbound coast came full into view. The moon lay in full splendour on the sea, lighting up each wave as it rolled landward with a myriad scintillations, making each jagged cliff and rock visible in its far recesses, and resting on an intervening landscape of about two miles, which still showed solitude, but of a gentler and more cultivated character.

As the carriage slowly descended to this lower level, stretching towards the sea, it was seen to be a wide undulating valley backed by great woods leading far away to the distant hills; its extremely picturesque undulations varied by brook and pool, by clumps of arbutus and birch trees, and a few enclosures fenced off from the waste as fields. At length the highway became more marked, the ceaseless roar of the ocean more audible; and the carriage passing from the post-road down a grassy slope into a wide courtyard, a large, irregular, substantial, one-storeyed, stone-built house came full in view. Sheltered landward by the wooded hills, it lay a few hundred yards from the shore, from which it was separated by a large plot of turf and a terrace walk. A wide porched gable at the southern end opened on the courtyard; and here, when the carriage stopped, an elderly woman, wearing the appearance of an upper servant, stood ready to receive the weary travellers.

Assisting them to alight, she led them through the porch into a well-lighted hall, and thence into a most comfortable room, warmed by a glowing peat fire, and in which welcome was typified by a substantial meal of mingled tea and supper. It was the most comfortable possible room,

and, as was apparent, had just been newly decorated and furnished.

"What a delightful room!" said Edith, as she looked round and warmed her hands in the cheery blaze. "The look of it is in itself a welcome. I expected what was so different."

"I'm glad you are pleased, ma'am," replied the woman respectfully: "first impressions may go some way in reconciling you to this lonely place. Everything has been done up afresh for you, and great improvements made. It was a sorry sort of place before, for it had been long used merely as a farmhouse; but Lady Mary and Dr. Marlow are anxious you should be comfortable and feel at home." The woman thus spoke English, though with a perceptible Scotch accent.

"I am really obliged by so much unexpected care and attention," replied Edith, who heard with some surprise this reference to a titled lady; but, concealing it, she merely asked when it was likely she should see Dr. Marlow, and when receive her pupils, for she had expected to find them here.

"They will come in a few days, ma'am. Lady Mary and the Doctor thought it best you should rest and settle down before they troubled you. They are staying in a village some mile from here."

"This is really kind and thoughtful. But I shall be glad to see them, and so will my children."

"I don't doubt it, ma'am. The young make ready friendships. But I was to bid you welcome, and say you are perfect mistress here. My name is Janet, or Forbes, which you please—though I am usually called the latter. I am housekeeper, with two maids and a man under me; but I am to obey your orders and attend to such arrangements as you make."

"Thank you. My ways of life are very simple; and, judging by the pleasant home thus prepared, I doubt not I shall be happy."

"Perhaps you will like to see the other rooms," began Forbes—forgetting possibly, in her housekeeping pride, the travellers' weariness.

"Yes, to-morrow," replied Edith. "These poor children must have our care, they are so weary." She spoke with truth, for Arthur, having taken a chair placed near the table, had leaned forward thereon and fallen asleep, and the girls having untied their hats and taken off their outer covering, stood pictures of heavy-lidded weariness beside the fire. Hot coffee and buttered cakes were therefore at once brought in, and after a slight repast Mrs. Forbes and Edith went upstairs with them. Nothing could be more charming than their several rooms. Arthur had one to himself; that adjacent was for Walter and Harold Marlow; Freda and Iole's room opened from that of Mrs. Hexham; and Lucy Marlow would sleep in a pretty chamber on the other side that of her governess. The children were soon in bed and asleep; and Edith, returning downstairs, partook of supper beside the cheery fire. When food and warmth had dispelled the languor and depression arising from great fatigue, she looked about her, and wondered more and more at the room and its decorations. It was panelled with a light-tinted native wood, simply varnished. The larger panels were filled with fine engravings, framed, of Landseer's best-known paintings, and the lesser panels with small landscapes and domestic subjects painted in water-colours. The furniture, strong and simple, was made of some native wood, and, where necessary, was covered with dark-coloured leather. The carpet was crimson, and crimson drapery fell on each side two deep bayed windows looking north and east. The drapery over neither was drawn—only blinds in that towards the east—so that Edith could see that the northern bay looked towards an undulating waste of great beauty, in the distance of which rose a wood-crowned height overhanging the wild and

rockbound shore. On this height could be just seen a tower of some castellated building—inhabited, probably, for lights faintly gleamed here and there.

As Edith Hexham stood admiring this exquisite landscape of mingled forest, hill, and waste, its loneliness and beauty intensified rather than lessened by the refulgent beauty of the moon at full, Forbes and an under-servant came in to clear the table, and following them came Lufy and Bob ; the one rushing forward with wild delight, the other more timid and stealthy, peeping furtively from side to side, to see no enemy was in ambush.

“Ah—the pets !” said Edith. “I could not leave them behind me ; and I fancy Dr. Marlow is too liberal a man to put restraint upon a taste of this kind.”

“He is a great lover of dogs, ma’am,” replied Forbes ; “and so are the ladies at the castle. Old Denis has fed both, and the cat’s feet we have rubbed with butter. It is the best way of reconciling him to a strange home.”

“So I’ve heard,” replied Edith ; and then stooping down, she caressed both, till they settled to rest in the full warmth of the ruddy blaze.

“Your kindness to these dumb travellers,” said Edith, with a smile, “makes me think of other things of value. Our trunks and carpet-bags I saw in the gallery upstairs ; but there are some large boxes, cases, and bundles, which if I knew were cared for I should sleep the easier.”

“As you had pointed them out when the fourgon was loaded, the servants knew them from the other luggage. Before they left for the castle, they helped Denis to carry them into the studio ; and there, if you will follow me, ma’am, you will see them.”

“The studio !” repeated Edith, in a tone expressive of the greatest surprise. “The studio ! I had one in London ! But here ! How could Dr. Marlow know I was an artist ?”

"I do not know, ma'am. All he said was that a very clever lady was coming from England, to teach his brother's children. A room was specially prepared, and he bade me and Milly the housemaid be sure and call it by its proper name."

Speaking thus, Forbes opened a door not far from the northern bay, and leading the way across the hall to an opposite door, entered a room still more striking than the one just left. It was lighted by three windows—two looking westward to the ocean, one north to the castellated heights. Beside this latter was a door, observable, and yet hidden away as it were in a corner : it might be a closet door, or one for private exit and entrance. The room was of good size, the floor covered with Indian matting, the walls painted Pompeian red, but otherwise undecorated, as though left bare for any paintings or pictures the expected artist might bring. Three old cabinets, a carved chest, some antique mirrors, a couch and chairs of various forms—some old, some new—old pottery, and various odds and ends, furnished the room.

As the housekeeper had said, the boxes, the chests, and the bundles (made up of easels, modelling slabs and stages, and other necessary appliances of the painter's and sculptor's art), had all been carefully taken into the room, and now stood ranged side by side. Of the boxes three were locked ; the rest, boxes and chests, had their lids nailed down. Those locked being easily opened, and containing, as it would seem, objects either of value or requiring early removal, Edith knelt, and taking a bunch of keys from her pocket, opened them one by one. From the first she took a painting, a copy of Rembrandt's noble picture "The Adoration of the Shepherds," in which the child Christ, lying in the manger, is worshipped by the wise men who have travelled from the East. The original is a beautiful production, painted with a luxuriant freedom of touch. The light proceeding from the

Holy Child is strikingly contrasted by the dark figure of a shepherd kneeling in the foreground ; and this Divine Light, so wonderful in the original, must have been copied with power and skill—for, Edith unfastening an easel and rearing the picture thereon, it was seen to scintillate in a manner striking even to a beholder ignorant of art. From another box she took a smaller and original painting, the subject being "Milton in Conference with Cromwell" ; and from a deep and larger box "A Group of Children" modelled in clay. When she had placed this more perishable piece of work in a place of safety, she lingered no longer, reserving for the morrow a nearer inspection and admiration of the room, and what she knew would be a more enchanting picture than mortal hand could paint—a view from its seaward windows.

Thoroughly tired out, she went upstairs to her bedroom, which she had only seen for a few minutes before, and which, she now found, was situated over the studio. It was furnished plainly, but with every modern luxury and comfort. The toilet showed that some refined and generous woman had ordered or superintended its decoration, and the many small knickknacks and appliances scattered round proved that nothing had been spared.

Lufy had followed her mistress upstairs, as was her wont, and now lay nestling in a corner on a travelling-rug. Putting out the candle—for the brilliancy of the moon was extreme—Edith sought one of the seaward windows, and drawing up the blind, was prepared for a sight of ravishing beauty. But nothing she had imagined, fertile and poetic as her imagination was, equalled what Nature thus set before her gaze. The ocean, so mighty as to stretch more than three thousand miles away to the shores of North America, rolled inward in great waves, their tops broken into crests like molten silver, their troughs with walls like dark-green glass, and

depths that were all but unseen from the awful darkness of their shadows. The sands for some space were white and firm, and newly washed by the receding tide, sparkled in the moonlight like a floor paved with precious stones. To the south, the shore, so far as she could see, was strewn with vast masses of broken rock, fringed landwards with arbutus shrubs. To the north the shore was soon hidden by high cliffs, trending seaward—the nearest being crowned by an ancient castle, of which one or more of the towers could be seen emerging from the thick surrounding woods. This nearest cliff lay about a mile away ; the castle, as it seemed, being reached through the woods landwards, for the cliffs, so far as the eye could see, presented nothing but steep acclivities towards the Grange and shore.

The bedroom, like the studio beneath, contained three windows—that looking towards the castle and cliffs being a bay, springing beyond the wall on which it rested. Moving to this window, from which the view landward and seaward was of the rarest character of wild and romantic beauty, she opened one of the casements and leaned out upon the sill. The enchanting prospect, the intense stillness, except for the monotonous roll of the great waves, the balmy air, its freshness from the sea and its scents from the flower-strewn woods, made her linger for some time, in spite of drowsiness and fatigue. At length, as she was closing the casement, she was surprised to see a figure emerge from beneath the cliffs which beetled on the shore. It came rapidly towards the Grange ; and as it came, she saw it was a man wrapped in a thick seaman's coat. Unwilling to be seen as a watcher, particularly at such an hour, she hurriedly closed the casement. As this moved a little stiffly, some noise was probably made, and heard by the one who approached, for immediately he turned, and retracing his steps, was soon lost in the deep shadows thrown forward by the cliffs. Surprised and wonder-

ing, Edith drew the blinds of all the windows, and undressing, retired to rest.

Sinking into a profound sleep, she had lain some time, when suddenly the dog, which for a few minutes had sat erect and audibly growled, burst into a wild howl, and rushing to the door, scratched violently, as though begging it should be opened. Awakened, and greatly terrified, Edith sprang out of bed and locked the door, then hastening into the girls' room—which as already said, opened from her own—she locked their door too. But whatever it was that had aroused the dog's anger, no sound met the ear. Presently Edith returned to bed, and the dog, ceasing its outcry, lay down as though to watch beside the door.

Scarcely, however, had she lain down, than she heard a key move in some lock in the room below ; to this followed whispering voices and shuffling feet, then came a treading back of the same feet, and a relocking of the door. Puzzled and wondering, Edith Hexham lay awake some time ; but at length wonder lapsed into unconsciousness, and she slept till the next day's sun had warmly risen, and land and sea were beautified by its glory.

CHAPTER II.

THE GRANGE AT MORR.

WHEN Edith Hexham awoke next morning from the almost death-like sleep of intense fatigue, it was past nine o'clock. This the sun, as well as her watch, told her. Rising hastily, she passed to one of the seaward windows, and drawing up the blind, looked out upon the day. To her surprise she saw that Arthur and the two girls had been already out upon the sands, and now approaching the house with their hands full of mingled sea-weeds and wild flowers, seemed as though they had been to some spot beyond the cliffs, where woods and downs approached and met the shore.

"What a sluggard I am!" she thought; "and what an opinion this sedate housekeeper will have of me! I ought to have been up attending to the children instead of being——"

At this moment a knock came on the door. Opening it, the housekeeper stood there, repeating her curtsy of the overnight, and inquiring if the lady had rested.

"Only too well, Forbes. I am ashamed——"

"If you had slept till nightfall, Mrs. Hexham," replied Forbes, "it would have been no wonder, seeing how fatigued you were. Breakfast is ready, and the children hungry, I daresay; for after my attendance on them, I thought a run on the shore would be the best thing."

"Thank you, Forbes. Another morning I hope to be equal to my duties."

"The duty of attending to them will be mine. I am an old nurse, and for the best part of my life have been accustomed to children. The Ladies Clare wish me to take all this responsibility on myself. Breakfast is ready. And I should add that the door there opens into a dressing-room, and adjoining that is the bath-room, with hot or cold sea-water or fresh water, just as you please." And Forbes, who was quick of foot, retraced her steps.

When she had refreshed herself with a delicious bath of fresh sea-water, and completed her toilet, Edith hastened downstairs. If the room they had used the overnight looked cheery then, it did much more so on this fine May morning, for the sun, lying on the eastern front or rear of the house, not only brightened the mossy grey stone courtyard, but lay beyond its very low separating wall, and in the orchard croft still further on beautified the myriad flowers of spring. A bounteous meal was nicely, even elegantly, spread; and fish of various sorts, eggs, new milk, oaten cake, and freshly-churned butter looked appetizing dainties to those who had lived in a great city like London.

As Edith entered, the children stood around a side-table, spreading out their treasures of shells, sea-anemones and weeds, in dishes and cups Forbes had provided them with; whilst their great bouquet of mingled hawthorn blossoms, celandine, harebells, violets and primroses, was already in a glass in the centre of the breakfast table. Seeing Edith, they clustered round her like happy bees, their greetings and caresses expressing their happiness.

"Edith," said Arthur, "how glad I am we came! I didn't imagine that the world held such a grand wild place. Why, we have been round that high jutting cliff on which stands a castle, and beyond that, and round another and higher cliff,

which goes still further into the sea. Beyond this is the wildest, loneliest, and most rugged shore you can conceive, whilst landward is a lake or river, extending far away—which is in perfect contrast, for it seemed to us so still and lovely. Oh, Edith, you should see the scene—that you should! You will come directly after breakfast, won't you?"

The girls added their entreaties.

"I scarcely can, children, till afternoon. I have my work to unpack, and various things to see to. However, I will just cross the lawn to the shore with you for ten minutes before I begin. Let us now take our breakfasts: Mrs. Forbes is here with the tea, and Bob, who seems at home already, is purring for his milk. I am very sure he will find Irish milk better than English."

At this moment Luffy came bounding in through the open door. She had been inspecting the yard and kennel, and seeing what Irish dogs were like. As she leapt up to greet her mistress, Edith bethought her of the clamour raised in the night. She questioned the children, but they had slept too deeply to hear sounds of any kind. Forbes presently, however, entering the room, Edith repeated the question.

"Strange sounds, and the dog aroused and barking?" replied the housekeeper; and as Edith with quick ear detected a sudden change in her voice, "That is strange, for I heard nothing. Perhaps, ma'am, it was the roar of the sea, to which you are unaccustomed, or——" And she hesitated.

"No," said Edith, "the sounds came from the room below,—from the studio. I heard a door unlocked, then two persons entering, crossed the room. Yes, I noticed another door. Pray where does it lead to?"

"There is the gable door. It opens into a broad grassy avenue which leads towards the castle."

"And who keeps the key?"

"I don't know, ma'am. I do not know if there is one. I

will ask Denis. He is often up and about at nights." Saying this, the housekeeper left the room.

"It is quite clear there *is* a mystery, and concealment is attempted," thought Edith; "and it is equally certain I shall gather nothing from Mrs. Forbes, who is shrewdly Scotch. I had better keep silence, and observe. I only hope, for the children's sake, the mystery has no ill in it. And yet Dr. Granville, my good kind physician, would not have advised me to go so far, if evil were to come. I will dismiss all fear, but still be watchful."

The children had never tasted such a breakfast before. They vowed that Irish fish and Irish poultry had thrice the flavour of that of England. The cat revelled in unlimited saucers of milk; and Luffy, full of life, barked and begged bones with the utmost pertinacity. Breakfast finished, Edith rose.

"I will walk across the lawn to the shore with you," she said to the children, "and after that you must amuse yourselves. We will ask Mrs. Forbes what time we dine. So come."

As she spoke she opened the room door into the wide hall which ran from north to south; and doing so, she saw that the door of the studio, opposite, stood open. The sun shone warmly in, and falling on the easel she had set up the overnight, she perceived at a glance, and to her great astonishment, that the copy of "The Adoration" stood upside down. She distinctly recollected it stood right when she left it, for the light of the lamp the housekeeper carried, falling on the nimbus around the Child's head, had intensified its effects in a degree which, even in a final and momentary glance, had pleased her well—for they were effects which, so fine in the original, she had striven with earnest zeal to imitate.

"This picture has been moved," she thought, "and brought

back or set down by some ignorant person. This proves that the sounds I heard were not imaginary."

The children, following Edith, at once perceived the same mistake ; but their surprise was in a moment lost in wonder at the charming room.

"Why, mamma," said Freda, "I don't think in all the studios you have imagined and pictured to us, you ever fancied one so charming as this. What nice old furniture—what views from the windows—how altogether lovely it is ! Why, surely Dr. Marlow must have learnt that you are an artist ! How well you will paint and model here !"

"I ought to do so, dear ; and I hope the room will look still more charming when you return from your walk, for old Denis (who, by the way, I have not yet seen) is going to help me to unpack and hang the pictures. Now let us go."

But the children would linger yet some minutes, to examine each thing in detail, for they loved Edith and were glad to see her pleased. At length, running out before her into the wide sunny hall, they made for the porch.

At this moment the housekeeper was coming from one of the rooms ; and Edith, staying, asked her what would be the dinner-hour, for the children were bent on a ramble.

"What hour you please, ma'am."

"We have been accustomed to early ones : breakfast at eight, dinner at one, tea at five, supper at nine. Speaking for myself, I like dining late ; but I have learnt to accustom my habits to those of the children."

"It is Lady Mary's wish that you should suit your own convenience in these things."

"Thank you." And Edith was following Arthur and the girls when the housekeeper spoke again.

"You will excuse me naming one thing—indeed, I am deputed to do so. The young gentleman and ladies can ramble anywhere they please except in the castle grounds

and their immediate neighbourhood. The Ladies Clare live very privately; they see few except their own family, and being aged and somewhat invalids, they are shy of strangers."

"The children with me are good and obedient," replied Edith Hexham, earnestly, "and any expressed wish will, I am sure, be attended to. Be assured we shall none of us intrude." And saying this, Edith stepped lightly through the porch into the glorious sunshine of the sweet May morning.

A more glorious scene never lay before the eye of poet or painter. The mighty ocean, the tranquil shore, the vivid vernal loveliness of leaf and bud, the bright blue heavens, and the cherishing sunlight, were together a revelation of joy and hope to the soul. Edith Hexham had an artist's eye, and much sensibility, and revelled with intense pleasure in the beauty of the morn.

A side path from the porch led to the lawn, and this was intersected by several terraces. That which ran parallel with the shore was slightly raised. From this sloped down a bank of turf to a pretty wide strip of coarse grass and weeds, and this again met the shore. The sands were dry and hard, and countless pretty shells and stones lay newly washed by the receding tide. Edith joined the children, and sat down upon the sands. For some minutes she watched the ocean, and then rising, viewed the rearward scene. The old, large, irregular, unpretending stone-built house she had just left looked homelike and pleasant, and the woods and distant hills gave an exquisite background. To the south were the wild, rock-strewn shore, the fields, the waste, and still higher mountains, and to the north rose the castle-crowned headland; and further, more stretching out to sea, a still mightier mass of rock, which sloped abruptly landward. Castle Morr, as seen in the vivid brightness of the morning, looked a massive, grand, and antiquated place, yet in good repair, and with an air of habitation. This sight of the

castle brought instantly to her mind the housekeeper's injunction, and this she now repeated to the children.

Arthur was an acute boy, so after a moment's thought he said, "Well, it's funny. The old ladies, I should think, couldn't walk in frost and snow, and even in summer the place is wide enough for them and others. Edith, don't you think there is more in the matter than we perceive?"

"It may be—indeed, I think so."

"Well! if there's a secret, I'll find it out."

"Not so, Arthur. If there's a secret, it is for us to respect it. If mystery there be, it can in no way relate to us. We have been nobly and generously received—indeed, more as honoured guests than strangers—and it is not for us to make return by unworthy and ungenerous curiosity. I will steadfastly believe that so kind and true a friend as Dr. Granville, the physician to whom I owe my life, is not the man to advise me to come here if there were any cause of evil or danger."

This was all that was said on the matter. In a few minutes the children had departed to the rock-strewn shore, and Edith returned to the house. The housekeeper waited once more for her in the hall. She would show her the tasteful drawing-room, the room which was to serve as library and schoolroom, the dining-room, and children's play-room. From this she led the way into a true farmhouse kitchen, housekeeper's room, brewhouse, dairy, and other offices. To show what a pleasant home it was, see the ground-plan on next page.

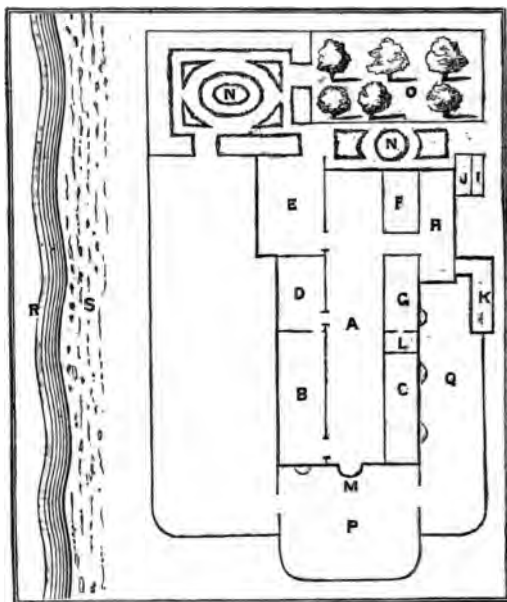
Edith at length reached the studio, and there she found a comical-looking old man patiently awaiting her coming. He was a thin, wiry old fellow, with a true Irish expression of face and brogue. Touching his forelock reverently, he said he waited her commands.

"Thank you. I suppose you are Denis?"

"Denis O'More—at your ladyship's pleasure."

"You can unnailed these boxes, I suppose, and hang the pictures they hold?"

"Shure can I. Many's the hundred picturs Denis has hung. You'll find me handy, me lady."



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|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| A, Hall. | G, Playroom. | N, Garden. |
| B, Drawing Room. | H, Kitchen. | O, Orchard. |
| C, Dining Room. | I, Dairy. | P, Front Court. |
| D, Breakfast Room. | J, Storeroom. | Q, Side Court. |
| E, Studio. | K, Housekeeper's Room | R, Sea. |
| F, Study or Schoolroom. | L, Passage. | S, Beach. |
| | M, Porch. | |

His self-praise was not without reason. He set to his work with dexterity and quickness, and in a comparatively short time had unpacked and hung seven or eight pictures of various sizes. He then helped Edith to unpack and arrange her models, clay, tools, and other appliances of

the sculptor's art. When all was done, Denis looked round the studio admiringly.

"Shure, me lady, it's an illigint room—the castle don't contain a prithier. The Dochter Marlow and the Lady Mary will be wondering how a young gintlewoman like you could come over the say wid all this baggage. This grate picthur wid the lamb in it——"

"It is 'St. John and the Lamb'—a copy of a famous picture. And here is a copy of another famous picture—'The Adoration of the Shepherds.' That wonderful Child in the manger is Jesus Christ."

"His name be praised !" replied the old man. Then, after a moment's pause, he added, "And you, me lady, painted them? You, sich a young gintlewoman, and a widdy too ! It must have been a sad throuble to you, me lady, to be lift alone."

"No !" replied Edith, in a voice which plainly expressed that a remark of this sort was not acceptable. Then she added quickly, as though to change the subject, "Does any one living at the castle paint pictures ? As you have hung so many there, you may know."

Denis shook his head. "The likes of me don't know things of this sort, me lady. I'm only an ould sarvant, and a man that's handy. I'm come to the Grange to garden, milk, and do what's niscissiry. And now, wid yer kind lave, I'll begin wid the boxes : their littler don't befit company."

Thus speaking, the brisk old man put a box on his shoulder and left the room. He returned repeatedly, till all the boxes, cases, and wrappers were removed ; and Milly following with brush and duster, all traces of the morning's employment had soon vanished. Edith, with the keenness of perception which training and education give, understood at once that the old man, like the housekeeper, had some reason, however garrulous on other points, for keeping silence on all relating

to the castle and its inmates. And as the secret, if secret there were, could bear no reference to herself, she resolved, as far as concerned the inmates of the Grange, to let silent observation be her only form of inquiry.

She sat down on the seat of the oriel window, to observe the effects of the new lights and shadows on her pictures. Over the fireplace, which was opposite to where she sat, she had hung her copy of Correggio's "Holy Family,"—a small but famous picture, and one of the gems of the National Gallery. The original bears all the characteristics of this great Italian master. The heads have the highest beauty and delicacy ; and the Virgin's lovely expression of maternal rapture has an inexpressible charm for most beholders. Such is the original ; and of no mean merit was this ambitious copy. "The Adoration of the Shepherds" she had hung opposite the western windows ; and elsewhere, on some few of the available spaces, she had placed copies of various well-known landscapes—as also originals of considerable merit. Her sculptor's work stood in the subdued light of the window where she sat ; and several small statues and bas-reliefs were variously supported here and there.

Dinner hour approaching, she went to change her dress, wondering as she did so why the children had not returned. But on coming downstairs and going to the porch to look, she saw them running towards the house with the utmost speed. In a few minutes they were beside her, breathless and weary.

• "Oh ! mamma," said Freda, "we have been such a wonderful walk, and so far too !"

"Quite six or seven miles, I should say," added Arthur ; "and not knowing the time, we began to fear we should be too late for dinner. Another day I will take that old watch of Uncle Hexham's which you gave me."

"Be sure to do so," replied Edith. "When we settle down

to work we must keep good time, or our days will not be half long enough for all we shall have to do. And now, girls, make haste and change your frocks ; and you, Arthur, make yourself fit to go in to dinner. Your shoes are all sand and mud, and your hair is as wild as a colt's tail."

" But we must tell you, mamma——" began Freda.

" Hush, Freda !" interrupted Arthur, half angrily : " didn't we agree that I should tell mamma the story ? Well, beyond the point of the shore you can see from here, the rocks, which for some way are broken and lie scattered about, gradually rise into great cliffs which face the sea. Of these some are hollowed out into great caves, with windings and twistings of all kinds. We entered one, and following its windings first to the right and then to the left for some way, were about to return—for the girls began to be frightened—when all at once we smelt tobacco smoke and heard the sound of voices. Determined to see what I could, I led the girls outside the cave and bade them wait. Then returning, I soon came to a narrow fissure or opening in the rocks, just wide enough to admit a man—but which I could see very imperfectly, owing to the dim light. It led into a sort of passage, in which, at the distance of a few yards, two steps led up into a much larger cave. Over the rather narrow entrance into this a heavy piece of wood was drawn, and other pieces lying on the floor hard by showed that at will the aperture could be wholly covered and perhaps defended from within. Raising myself on tiptoe, a little sideways from the steps, I could see that the cave was very large—more like a hall or chapel than a room. It was warmed and apparently lighted by a great wood fire, the smoke of which curled and wreathed about the roof. An old woman sat beside it on a stool, apparently frying something in a great pan, for the fat within it hissed and bubbled tremendously. She was not alone, for several men lay about smoking, drinking, and play-

ing cards. In one corner of the cave was a small bed, two or three chairs, a great chest, and a little table ; but the most strange thing was, that the floor, for nearly two-thirds of its space, was covered with little barrels, a few small boxes, and a good many large square bundles sewn up in canvas. When I had made this survey, I thought it best to beat a retreat, the game of cards being apparently at an end, and the meal just ready. I got away without being seen ; though I fancy I shouldn't had those fellows caught a glimpse of me. It was a jolly adventure, wasn't it ? ”

“ And a very hazardous and foolish one, and which I hope you will never repeat. This class of men, living amidst crime and danger, are always lawless and brutal, and would readily take your life if they discovered you watching them. Now, I want no more romance, but my dinner ; so make haste.”

The Irish dinner was worthy of the Irish breakfast : Milly, the housemaid, waiting, in the neatest of caps and gowns. It was quite evident, from all these signs of comfort and respectful attention, that the daily routine at the Grange was ordered by those who were alike generous and refined.

After dinner Edith had no rest till she started with the children to the southern shore. They wanted her to accompany them to the cliffs ; but refusing on account of fatigue, she added that she had no desire to encounter lawless men, and that from something old Denis had said, Dr. Marlow might visit the Grange that afternoon, so there was need to keep in the vicinity. Thus deciding, Arthur found her a charming seat on the shore, not too far from the house. It was on one of many vast fragments of rock, time-worn and sea-worn, scattered around. It now rested beyond the reach of the tide, though in previous ages the waves had worn down its seaward face into nooks and platforms, which here

and there formed sheltered and pleasant seats. The ocean rolled in at the distance of some thirty yards ; the white sands were strewn with marine plants, stones, and shells, and the various masses of rock were picturesquely decorated with lichens and plants of many kinds.

Here Mrs. Hexham rested, while the girls searched about for shells and stones ; sometimes letting the waves wash over their shoes, and at others fleeing before them, merrily laughing as they did so. Arthur amused himself by climbing up and down the rocks, returning every now and then to bring Edith some tiny fern, lichen, or specimen of moss.

Some time had thus run by, when Edith was startled by a sudden rushing sound, and as instantly a lion-dog of gigantic size, followed by others smaller and of different kinds, leapt from between the rocks and thence into the sea. After buffeting with the waves a single moment, he returned, shook his dripping coat, and then, with the utmost gentleness and docility, stalked leisurely forward and laid his great wet muzzle in Edith's hand. The whole movement was so sudden as not to occupy a minute. Lufra, caught napping on the seat beside her mistress, leapt up at once and rushed at the intruder ; but the great lion-dog, conscious of its power, took no notice of the little snarler, but content to rest its nose where it had placed it, looked up sagaciously and kindly into Edith's face.

"Be quiet, Lufra," she said, pushing her favourite away ; "you mustn't be so jealous. This is a grand and beautiful fellow." Then coaxing the huge animal, she raised its shaggy head and looked before her. And there before her stood a gentleman of about forty years old, his grave and somewhat austere face being shaded by a dark and heavy beard slightly tinged with grey. He was regarding her with an intensity so startling that she at once rose to her feet.

"Excuse me," he said, lifting his hat reverently ; "Nero

has introduced me too abruptly. I am Dr. Marlow. You, I presume, are Mrs. Hexham?"

"Yes; I arrived at Morr last night."

"And are much fatigued, I fear. Forbes says so."

"A little so; but a few days' rest in this delightful place will soon restore me, Dr. Marlow. The——"

"You like it?" he interrupted. "I am glad; in this case we may have some chance of retaining you in these solitudes. And now, may I ask you to return to the Grange? Lady Mary Clare, and her companion Miss Haller, have driven over, and wish to see you and the children."

Edith called them; and they, obeying, gathered round her at once, and together they followed Dr. Marlow, who, surrounded by his dogs—for he had with him seven or eight of different kinds and sizes, beside the huge animal who had signalled out the stranger as a favourite—had wound his way from amidst the larger masses of rock on to the crisp dry turf which lay beyond. Here he waited, and, as Edith approached, again regarded her fixedly. As she thus saw his face more clearly in the open, she felt sure she had seen it before, and that more than once or twice; but where she could not recollect.

She was spared any embarrassment this curiosity, or rather attempt to read her character, might have occasioned, by Nero again stalking forward and licking her ungloved hand. Patting his beautiful head, she expressed her admiration of his form and countenance.

"Yes: Nero is a grand creature, and though only a dog, he is a good judge of persons. It is not often he thus expresses his liking so decidedly for strangers, so we will accept it as a good omen."

"Thank you. And he is a favourite, I presume?"

"A great one. He guards the apartments in the castle by night; and woe to the stranger who should intrude!"

"No one would, I should think."

"Well, it is not desirable." Then turning to the children somewhat abruptly, he laid his hand on Arthur's shoulder and remarked, "This looks a fine-spirited lad. What is his name and age?"

"Arthur Betton; and his age is fourteen. This, his elder sister, Ethelfreda, is twelve, and his younger sister, Iole, eight."

"I should have recollected this, for Dr. Granville was precise in giving me all necessary information. Their ages will, I think, assimilate well with those of my nephews and niece."

"And when, Dr. Marlow, may I expect to see them? I thought to find them at the Grange."

"No: the house was only finished last week. Since I fetched them from Southampton, six weeks ago, they have been staying at the house of a steward of the Ladies Clare, in a village some forty miles from here. The servants and fourgon will be sent for them early next week; and till then you must take holiday, and visit the shore, woods, and hills. It is a beautiful and most varied country—one fit for such a lover of nature as I conclude you to be. The only drawback is its profound solitude. Lonely—very lonely—as I informed you through Dr. Granville."

"But not so lonely as a great city, Dr. Marlow, if you chance to be a stranger amidst its multitudes. If I am to have solitude, let it be that of nature. And how can I be lonely here, with six children around me, and my duties to perform?"

"True. Nevertheless the face of man is a glad thing, and here we have most things but men. You may travel for three days together across these wilds and see no living face, except it be that of a smuggler, or revenue officers in search of him. Now we will, if you please, walk on."

Dr. Marlow led the way over the green elastic turf towards the Grange; but when it came in sight he slackened his pace, so as to bring it to that of Mrs. Hexham and the children.

"May I ask you," he said, addressing Edith, "what was the list of things you were to teach?"

"English, Latin, French, the rudiments of German and mathematics; drawing, music——"

"Much too heavy a list," he interrupted. "Dr. Granville tells me so. It must be abridged, and you will thus have time for your art. It is a necessity, he adds, if we are to have any chance of retaining you."

"Dr. Granville is kind, and so are you, sir. Our reception last night could not be better or more hospitable than it was. I expected no such home of luxury and comfort, and I am anxious to do my duty in return."

"Of that I am sure. Now just tell the children to walk on. I have a few words to say to you in confidence."

Edith told Arthur to go forward with the girls—which he did grumblingly, considering that Dr. Marlow treated him as a child.

"Freda," he said in a whisper, when at a sufficient distance not to be overheard, "if this old Doctor has any secret, be sure I'll find it out. Buggaboos in castles don't frighten me. I'll be Jack, and, climbing up the bean-stalk, slay the giant."

"Hush, Arthur: if there is any secret, there is a reason for it, and it can be nothing to us. If mamma heard you she would be very angry. Don't let us vex her,—she is so good."

"I know that. I love Aunt Edith as well as you do. But girls are always such frightened, silly things. You heard what he said about the great dog! Wait till these boys come, and then, if they've any spirit in them, we'll soon see." Thus saying, and whistling a tune, he ran to the porch to

speaking to the coachman and see the horses ; for Lady Clare had come in her carriage, and here it stood.

Whatever it was Dr. Marlow had to impart to Mrs. Hexham, its narrative was soon accomplished, for almost as soon as the children she reached the porch, and thence he ushered her into the drawing-room, where Lady Clare occupied an easy chair by the open window, and Miss Haller sat not far off. The former was a small, thin gentlewoman of about sixty-eight—her face still retaining traces of great beauty ; and its expression, refined and in a measure gentle, was yet in a greater degree full of character and firmness. She was very richly but plainly attired, and her whole air was expressive of a long life of association with those at once refined and intellectual. Miss Haller, whose age might be about fifty, was her exact opposite. Tall, masculine, plain, her speech was as abrupt as her manner ; and yet there was an honesty in her look, and a kindness in her large grey eyes, which won at once the beholder. Edith received the instant impression that Miss Haller would be her friend.

"This is Mrs. Hexham," said Dr. Marlow, as Edith advanced to the lady's chair : "our friend Dr. Granville has written highly of her."

"Indeed he has ; and Dr. Granville is an esteemed and valued friend. Please, Mrs. Hexham, sit down, and tell me about your health and journey."

Edith obeyed. It was evident the interest expressed was not that of mere curiosity, but friendliness ; so she sat down, and replied briefly.

"You still look fatigued, Mrs. Hexham," said Lady Mary ; "the other children must not come too soon, and when they do the lessons must be neither too many nor too long."

"I do not intend it," spoke Dr. Marlow : "Dr. Granville has warned me on that point. Mrs. Hexham must employ herself in art, take walks with the children, teach them even

in their play, and show just now that Irish air and Irish food can bring colour to her cheeks. Miss Haller has promised to give the little girls lessons in French, German, and music ; and I, why, I have some thoughts of brushing up my Latin and mathematics, and turning schoolmaster for three or four hours on three days a week. I have been looking at the old tower, still standing in the ruins of what two centuries ago was a fort ; and I think the carpenter may soon make one of the circular rooms fit for little scholars. The tower stands near the castle, and this will be a matter of consequence to me. I have your sanction, I am sure, Lady Mary, for this use of what is otherwise useless, except as a receptacle for old stores."

"You have, Dr. Marlow : we must all try to make Mrs. Hexham happy in this Irish solitude. And now," added Lady Mary, turning to Edith, "tell me about your children. Not yours : I distinctly understand they are your dead husband's relatives. What are their ages, and——"

"They shall show for themselves," interrupted the Doctor : "they are at the porch." And he crossed the room as though to call them.

"You look very young," continued Lady Mary to Edith ; "but your face, when at rest, has a touch of sadness in it, which bespeaks trial and sorrow. How long were you a wife, and how long have you been a widow ?"

"I would rather not speak of my marriage, Lady Clare," replied Edith, in a tone which expressed coldness and reserve. "I never speak of it—especially to strangers. Most of us have some sorrow or another, which is best hidden in our own breast."

"Indeed we have," was the reply ; "none can say this more truly than I. Pardon me : I did not ask you out of curiosity. You are young, and I am old ; and when this is the case the old are apt to sin, because the promptings of nature make

a parental feeling theirs. I have simply come down to the Grange to impress on Forbes the necessity of being a kind nurse and attentive housekeeper, and to assure you that though Lady Isabel and I lead, from choice, a most recluse life, and receive no one except members of our own family, who come from England and Scotland occasionally, I am yet very desirous of showing you every kindness. Miss Haller will interpret for me and my sister ; and should we fail in anticipating any of the needs of a place so far removed from towns, do not hesitate to send me a note or message, and I will respond to it, if possible. I hope you will understand me : I mean kindness, not impertinence."

"I am sure you do, Lady Clare," replied Edith, much touched ; "and so far as your privacy is concerned, be quite sure I shall never trespass upon it ; and moreover, for myself and the children who are with me, I thank you heartily for our generous reception of last night, and for this noble home. If I am not happy in it, and do not make others happy in it, the fault is neither yours nor that of Dr. Marlow."

She rose as she spoke, for she could hear the children's feet along the hall, and she wished they should come in gently and gracefully towards the lady ; and then she saw that Dr. Marlow still stood by the open door. He had probably called the children, and they were now obeying his call ; but he had never left the room, and standing there had heard what she said, and this with a rapt attention that surprised and almost pained her.

Lady Mary and Miss Haller were pleased with the children, who spoke softly and answered with innocent ease. They told the ladies that they anticipated their playfellows coming, and hoped it would be soon.

"Next week, I think," was Lady Mary's answer ; "and then Lady Isabel and I must recollect that we once were children ourselves. And now," she added, addressing Edith,

"may I see your pictures? I did not like to trespass without your sanction. I hear a studio has been fitted up for you: I am glad of it. All my family love art—some members of it passionately; and when young I was a draughtswoman myself, though but an indifferent one. Haller! your arm."

The companion rose, and she and Lady Mary left the room together—for the latter, being feeble and slow of foot, needed support.

Dr. Marlow preceded them; and the children followed with curiosity and interest, for they were in some degree aware how Edith had toiled through sorrow to the accomplishment of these things. Again Lady Mary and her companion took seats, and when they had looked around them for some minutes, the former pointed to a small oil painting, and asking to see it a little nearer, Dr. Marlow took it down and brought it to her.

It represented the expressive face of a man who was seemingly imprisoned in a high-placed tower, from which probably he was never to go forth with life. He stood by a casement, and looked out on a distant landscape with eagerness and sorrow, for it was a landscape which, though his eyes thus feasted on, his feet would never tread. The extraordinary contrast of light and shade made the manner almost Rembrandtesque; and the sorrow, in connexion with the intense longing expressed, rendered the painting a most remarkable one.

"By what name do you call it?" asked Lady Mary, looking up with interest into Edith's face.

"I really never named it, Lady Mary," was the reply; "it was more a study in light and shade than anything else. I do not doubt, amid the variations and mysteries of human life, there are those who, prisoners like that rugged-looking man, sigh as he appears to sigh for beauties of nature which he can neither bring to him nor approach."

"Without doubt," replied the aged lady, with marked emotion; "without doubt. And without wishing to be impertinent, may I ask when and where did you paint this picture?"

"In London, about two years ago. Its original—for this is but a copy—I sold in a strange manner. Leaving it at a shop to be framed, the man, when he had supplied what it wanted, placed it in the window. The next day he came to me, and asking if I would sell it, named what I considered a good price. Needing money—for I have had to keep and educate these children, besides myself, out of a very small income—I parted with it; and after that I occasionally sold him a picture. He would never tell me who was the purchaser; but I have often thought it was Dr. Granville—although I did not make his acquaintance till he was called in by the surgeon who attended me through a dangerous illness."

"Well," replied Lady Clare, "to me it is a striking picture; and should you have time (which I hope you will have), I shall be personally obliged if you will paint me and Lady Isabel a few landscapes—small landscapes, particularly, will please my sister. She is, as I have told you, an invalid, and has led a recluse life for many years. But she remembers many a lovely scene in this neighbourhood, and would, I am sure, rejoice to see their representation on canvas."

"I shall be only too happy to oblige you, Lady Clare," replied Edith, "although I paint figures better than landscapes. But the wish to give expression to my sense of your generous hospitality may aid me in the matter."

Thanking her, Lady Clare rose to go; but Miss Haller asked for a few minutes' time to speak to Edith respecting the lessons she proposed to give the little girls, and to this end she called Mrs. Hexham aside into the bay of the northern window.

"I cannot attend regularly," she said, "for my engagements are so uncertain. I may promise to come, and may not be able, but be sure I will do the best I can. The other children come next week. Some afternoon shortly after, I will, if possible, drive over and give the little girls their first music lesson."

"Thank you heartily," answered Edith; "music is not my forte, though I play a little and teach it passably; and I trust you will at all times suit your own convenience."

"Thank you; I will be as punctual a mistress as I can. Only let me spare your time, so as to enable you to paint these dear and generous ladies some of the scenes amid which they have passed their lives, and I feel I shall have done well." Speaking thus, she took a tablet from her pocket and made an entry therein.

As she thus stood Edith looked and saw that Lady Clare, supporting herself by the back of a chair, was observing the picture she had already noted, and in a low voice speaking thereon to Dr. Marlow.

"This is striking," she said, "but the original is much more so." Then, lowering her voice to a whisper, she added, "—— thinks so." Some name was spoken, but too faintly to be heard. If Lady Clare had seen the original, it must be in her possession! This was a revelation, though it only deepened the mystery connected with it.

After a few further words, principally of adieu, Lady Clare took Miss Haller's arm and withdrew to her carriage, Dr. Marlow attending them, and Edith and the children following. Very gracious was the old lady to the latter; and her last words bore reference to some present she should send them so soon as their companions had arrived.

The carriage departed, and Dr. Marlow did not return into the house. Merely saying that he should pay a visit as soon as his niece and nephews had come, he ceremoniously

lifted his hat, and bent his steps in the direction of the shore.

It was five o'clock, and tea was ready in the pleasant room in which Edith and the children had been received the night before. When it had been partaken of they went out of doors again—this time leaving the sea behind and making for the woods.

As already said, a wide pathway or open lane led up from the Grange to the post-road, which wound down from the hills, and passing the rear of the house, went onwards to the castle. A portion of the courtyard, the rearward kitchens, and orchard and garden fenced it on one side ; on the other, opposite, were outhouses and farm-buildings, kitchen garden, more orchard, and then fields—till these, more and more dotted with trees, merged into woods. Opposite the Grange, or nearly so, another narrow lane opened from the post-road ; and pursuing this, Edith and the children soon gained a newer and equally fairy land. It opened into a forest glade ; the glade ascended to higher and higher ground, till at length, reaching an altitude bare of trees and carpeted with turf, a landscape of extraordinary beauty lay before them. Its chief feature was a chain of lakes, winding their way—one lake falling into another—till lost in the shadows of distant hills. Sometimes dense woodlands crept down to their shores, more frequently the turf of the hills met meadow-like the beautiful waters ; lichen-covered rocks formed boldly advancing promontories ; wide patches of gravel and shingle marked the margin here and there, and where the waters were loveliest, deep or shallow as the case might be, little lawny islets dotted the lakes, and added variety to their tranquil beauty. Edith and the children sat down on the trunk of a felled tree. The sun was beginning to decline, and its hues of varied glory fell on the waters, lighted up the vernal green of the woods, and in greater

effulgence rested on the many-coloured rocks and distant hills. The whole scene was paradisiacal, and Edith was intensely charmed.

"I will paint this," she said, "or as much of it as I can. If Lady Isabel has been an artist she must know this scene well. The first seen of the lakes, it shall be the one I will make trial of. May I succeed, and please these ladies!"

"I am sure you will, mamma," replied Freda. "When your work greatly pleases you, you always do it well."

For some time Mrs. Hexham sat—indeed, till the last rays of the sun had vanished from the lakes, and the softest of twilights following lent its own charm to the exquisite landscape. She then rose and called the children, who had been away among the surrounding trees; and when they came, their hands full of luxuriant wild flowers, they told her of a road which they had discovered, and which, more romantic than any they had yet seen, they wished to follow on their way home.

"Yes, if it does not lead us too far away from the Grange, and is practicable and safe," was the reply.

"It's a horse-road," replied Arthur; "hoofs of passing animals are plain to see. But rocks overhang it, and lower down a waterfall, over which there is a bridge, crosses it and tumbles down far below. It is just such a road as one reads of in Mrs. Radcliffe's stories. Come, mamma."

Edith consented; and Arthur, taking her hand, led her through the trees to some high rocks, beneath which ran the road. There was an opening through them, which entering they had nearly passed, when the sound of approaching cattle or horses came sharp and sudden on the ear. Restraining the eager children with her hand, they and Edith waited till the cavalcade should pass; which presently it did. It consisted of a long file of rough-coated ponies, the foremost being led by a man, and, so far as the

imperfect light showed, on it rode a small figure wrapped up in a coat or cloak. The rest of the ponies were laden with kegs or small barrels, two to each being swung pannier-wise across its back. Two ill-looking fellows brought up the rear. They were evidently smugglers bound to the southern shore, for soon after passing Edith and the children—of whose on-looking they were clearly unconscious—they turned aside into a narrow track, which led apparently in that direction.

Fortunately for the little company, twilight was rapidly followed by that of the moon, and they were thus enabled to trace their way along the rugged road, which, after it had passed the waterfall and the track the smugglers had taken, rapidly descended, and brought them safely out about half a mile beyond the Grange, into the post-road which ran at the rear.

The housekeeper had become a little uneasy at their prolonged absence, and was glad to welcome their return. Supper was ready, and when they had partaken of it the children went to bed ; but Edith, repairing to the drawing-room, found a packet of books and newspapers which had been sent down from the castle during her absence. This attention was acceptable ; but the scene beyond the open windows was a book too new, strange, and wonderful, not to take, for this night at least, the place of all others. The ocean rolled in in waves of liquid silver ; the sands they washed shone too, as they stretched away on either side in expressive loneliness ; and when she sat down and watched the glorious scene, the swell and break of the waves had soon an accompaniment, for some one playing the organ in a far-up room of the castle, the melody came borne towards the Grange on the fresh night wind. Doubtless it was Miss Haller playing to the Ladies Clare, who thus cheered their solitude by music as well as art.

CHAPTER III.

THE ISLE.

MRS. HEXHAM lost no time in commencing her water-colour painting of the Lakes of Morr, as seen from the woods behind the Grange. Starting off next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, accompanied by the children and Lufra, she painted all day—with the exception of an hour at noon, when they partook of luncheon, which old Denis toiled up the hill to bring. In that interval she heard the children their lessons—Arthur his Latin, the little girls their French and English ; for she had made them bring their books, considering the day too long for idleness, and that if Dr. Marlow and Miss Haller proved to be grave and earnest teachers, as from their manner she concluded they would be, the children must have some recent and preliminary discipline. If for this hour they were diligent, she allowed them to have full liberty during the long afternoon. At five o'clock they returned home to a mingled meal of dinner and tea, and after that passed the evening on the shore. When they returned, and the children had retired for the night, Edith took her place in the pleasant drawing-room, and there wrote letters and read the books and papers sent regularly from the castle. If the wind served, the strains of the organ came wafted from the castle ; for, as the housekeeper had remarked, Miss Haller was a German lady, and singing



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finely, as well as being perfect mistress of the organ and pianoforte, an evening rarely passed without her thus amusing the solitary ladies.

Thus several days passed speedily by. In painting her picture, Edith grew more and more acquainted with each detail of the lovely scene she copied ; and she thus became aware that a park wall, nearly hidden by trees, descended apparently from the height on which the castle was built, and stretching far away inland, hemmed in the first and second lakes on their eastern side. There was thus no access to them except by what apparently would be a long and wearisome détour. On one occasion, therefore, when old Denis brought the lunch, she inquired if there were not a way to the lakes without touching on the castle and its park ; and he explained that if they would round the headland on the northern shore, they would see their way plainly, for the second headland, though much the higher towards the sea, sank rearward rapidly to a level not greatly higher than the lakes, and thus the view from the castle was fine alike seaward and landward. Indeed, from some of the castle towers—in those, especially, inhabited by the Ladies Clare—the view of the first and second lakes was full and clear ; and this was highly prized, for though the first of a long chain, they were considered by judges to possess, on the whole, the finest scenery. The bay between the headlands was but small. When the tide was out it could be crossed ; and thence the path over the low landward side of the higher headland to the first lake was easy and plain. It skirted at some little distance the western edge of the park wall, which approaching the water dipped down into it and ended there. Thus the lake at this point, and thence all round its north-western shore, was open to all comers. The children, hearing this, wanted to set off at once ; but Edith reminded them that she had her picture to finish, and that it

would be best to reserve all these coming delights of novel scenery and discoveries of every kind till their little friends arrived.

At length the picture was finished, so far as nature was concerned ; and the steady work of a day or two at home completed it. It was evening, and seated in the northern bay of the studio, she had just put in the last touches, when the door opened, and Dr. Marlow, hat in hand, and followed by Nero, entered.

" I conjectured that the picture would be finished," he said ; " and so have come to see it, and to tell you that the children will be here to-morrow. The fourgon and servants started this afternoon, and early in the morning they will commence their journey homeward."

" I am truly glad of it. Arthur and his sisters covet companions ; and I shall be glad to realize my true duties. And, now I think of it, would there be any objection to our going out to meet the fourgon ? The children have asked me, and I do not like to refuse."

" Certainly not. How can there be ? Shall I order a carriage ?"

" No, Dr. Marlow, thank you. The children will like best a free wild run up to that moorland height we see so plainly from the shore, and I shall follow at an easier pace. In five minutes they will be acquainted with each other, I do not doubt."

" Yes : such is the freemasonry of youth. But let me see the picture ! I was not coming till to-morrow, but the hope of seeing it has brought me."

" I have only just finished it," was the reply ; " but you will see it best here by the seaward windows." And Mrs. Hexham, taking up the picture, carried it to where the light of the declining sun fell strongest.

Dr. Marlow removed it from her hands, and placed it in

position better suited to his sight. He looked at it fixedly for some minutes, studied every detail, and then said, quietly but emphatically, "This is really very beautiful, truthful, and masterly. I will take it with me. It will give a new pleasure to-night where one is sorely needed."

The inquiry was on her lips as to whether Lady Mary or Lady Isabel was ill, but a moment's remembrance made her stay.

"Lady Isabel will, I am sure, be pleased. I will take it with me ; this piece of green baize wrapped round it will be enough. This is all I have to say to-night. To-morrow I shall be more myself. At present I am weary : I have had a long and anxious vigil." He spoke not another word, but wrapping up the picture and calling Nero, went.

"I suppose this poor lady is often ill," thought Edith ; "and Dr. Marlow being responsible for her health, is naturally anxious. Well, if the picture does something to beguile a weary hour, I have been fortunate in having it ready."

Towards noon next day, she and the children set off to that ridge from which they had gained their first sight of Morr. It was a heavenly day, warm almost as June, although the heat was tempered by the fresh sea-breeze. As soon as they had passed the signs of cultivation—a few outlying fields, marked off from the waste by rude stone walls—the children, unable to restrain their anticipative pleasure, ran off hither and thither, like fawns at play. Sometimes they were lost behind the intervening bluffs, anon they came back to press into Edith's hands the sweetest and prettiest mountain flowers they could find. Once Arthur brought a little song bird they had caught—soon setting it free at Edith's intercession. The wild bees and the tiny blue butterflies of spring were abroad and on the wing—radiant creatures whose brief day was one of joy ; and yet their movements in the divine

sunlight were not more expressive of intense happiness than those of these happy children.

At last, three miles away from the Grange, they gained the turf height they sought. There they rested ; and Edith, having brought a book, beguiled the time by reading. By-and-by the children drew her attention to a figure which, moving to and fro at a little distance, seemed hurriedly seeking for something from amidst the shrubs, which here and there diversified the waste. As she drew nearer in her search, they saw it was an old woman bent with years, wretchedly attired in a red frieze cloak, her head wrapped in a ragged kerchief, and her whole appearance betokening extreme poverty. She was gathering herbs of some kind ; and when her hand was full, she came forward and took the road by which Edith and the children had ascended from Morr. As she passed them she stopped abruptly, turned a wistful look on Edith, and pointing towards the Grange, said something in an unknown tongue. Both Edith and the children strove to understand what she said, but could not ; and they were the more sorry as her eyes filled with tears as she spoke, and her whole manner expressed great anxiety and sorrow. Seeing that they could not understand her speech, she crossed her arms and rocked to and fro, as though nursing a child. This done, she pointed to the herbs and spoke again.

Edith's ready apprehension suggested a sick child ; and to express the interrogation " where ? " she pointed on either side across the landscape. But the old woman only moved her hand, as she had done before, in the direction of the Grange ; and then, seeing she was not understood, gave a wild shriek, threw up her arms, as though in despair, and hurried onwards in a direction opposite to Morr.

" Edith," said Arthur, " I think that is the same old woman I saw in the smugglers' cave. I am not sure, but she had a bent back much as this has."

"I wish I could have understood her," was the reply ; "I am sure what she said referred to sickness. I remember a few of her words, and will ask Denis their meaning when I return."

Long after the old woman had passed out of sight, Edith sat enjoying the heaven-like scene and the book she read. Thus noon passed, and afternoon came on ; and the carriage now expected, the children ran ahead and watched from higher ground. At length Arthur raised a shout : the carriage came in sight, and as it neared, the coachman tightened rein and drew up his horses.

So eager before, Arthur and his sisters drew back abashed ; but Edith, stepping to the fourgon, put forth her hand to a pretty little timid girl, and reaching up, kissed her face tenderly. Then she shook the boys by the hand and bade them welcome.

"Will you not have a short run ?" she said to the new-come children : "it will be better than sitting. For half a mile coachman will drive slowly for us, I'm sure."

They were delighted at the idea ; and when the servant had lifted them carefully down from the carriage, she made the boys shake each other by the hand, and Freda and Iole kiss Lucy. Then taking the last by the hand, she told her she wished to be very good to her, and fill as far as possible the place of her "dead mamma." The little maid had large wondering eyes, and looking steadily into Edith's face, replied, "I like you : what am I to call you ?"

"What you please, Lucy. My position towards you is that of governess."

"I won't call you governess. My dear mamma was kind and good ; the governess I had was cross. I'll think about it." Then, after a moment's pause, she added, "What do these little girls call you ?"

"Mamma. They are not my daughters—only distant rela-

tions ; but I have stood in the light of a mother to them for some years, and loving me like one, they call me mamma."

The child made no reply to this—only held Edith still more tightly by the hand. But presently, the other girls addressing her, she exchanged it [for theirs ; and a moment afterwards they had all three bounded away in chase of the boys. When they reached them, which presently they did, they all commenced talking to each other ; then followed a long run, hand in hand, down the hill ; and thus in ten minutes they were as pleasant company to each other as though they had been acquainted half their lives.

At the foot of the long descent, and before another commenced, was a tract of level ground. Here the carriage waited ; and when they had had running enough, as Edith thought, she called them together, and mounting the fourgon with them, the coachman drove rapidly on. Half an hour brought them to the Grange, where the housekeeper welcomed the new-comers, though she had been twice to see them since they reached Ireland. Nurse-like, she took them to their rooms, and, in no great while, they returned, and with the other children were soon seated round the tea-table in the dining-room, with Edith at their head and quite as merry as themselves.

The meal was almost finished, when the door opened and Dr. Marlow came in, followed by Nero. The new-come children rose to welcome him—though timidly, as Edith thought, for his manner ordinarily was grave and stern, his words few ; and though it was evident that he was sincerely pleased to see them, his demeanour showed little difference. He patted the boys on the head, told them to be obedient to Mrs. Hexham and good friends with Arthur and his sisters ; he raised his little niece in his arms and kissed her, and then replacing her in her seat, took one himself at the far end of the table. Though awed at first into silence, the children by

degrees resumed their merry talk, and Edith, attentive to their wants, kept silence too. From time to time, as she moved her gaze about the table, she could see that he was observing her with keen and curious interest ; but affecting perfect unobservance, she went steadily on with the duties before her.

At length he spoke, remarking that she already seemed quite at home with the children, and they with her. He was glad of it ; it was what he greatly wished.

To this Edith did not reply, beyond saying that all the children were orphans, and she hoped, as far as possible, to supply the place of a mother. Then she inquired if she might give him a cup of tea.

"Well, thank you, half a cup. I have not yet dined : I always dine very late." He then relapsed into his old watchful silence, and so sat for some minutes. When all the children had finished their meal, he rose, and bidding them follow him to the porch, said he wished to show them and Mrs. Hexham the schoolroom. Some carpenters and masons, who had come from a village called Islandmore, had been at work for several days, and had now rendered the old place habitable.

Crossing the lawn, and taking the direction of the northern shore, he went onwards for some distance, and then diverging east, led the way to where a road rose towards a mass of wooded rocks. It ran between them, and then turned into a small valley, nearly open to the sea, over which were scattered the ruins of a fort, once of considerable size, but now reduced to one weather-beaten tower. The headland on which Castle Morr stood rose high above it ; still it had a fine look-out far to sea. At some little distance to the rear of this fort stretched a wall ; and this ascending as the precipices rose to their altitude, rounded them towards the ocean, and descended thence to the bay on the other side. The ruins were picturesquely scattered just where time had left them,

and a few moss-grown flags led to an old iron clamped door in the basement of the tower. Before reaching it, however, Dr. Marlow slackened the pace at which he had hitherto led the way, and stayed for Edith. He was the most abrupt of men—studying, rather than avoiding, this strange perversity of manner ; although much of it, as Edith rightly guessed, was assumed.

“You will think,” he said, “that this will be a strange, wild place for children in winter time—for we have winter even here—and the road to it too exposed and rough ; but there is, as perhaps you guess, a far nearer and more sheltered way by the lane at the rear of the Grange. When that time comes——”

“I can fulfil the purpose for which I came here, and spare you trouble, and them exposure,” interrupted Mrs. Hexham.

“Though till now unknown to you, that purpose is not to teach, so much as to follow art. As I have already said, ask me no questions, for I cannot answer them ; but this much I may say—your first picture of the Lakes of Morr has given pleasure to a most critical and refined eye, and cheered the depression of grave illness. Paint others as they strike your eye and touch your heart : that will be sufficient. You must name your own price, and whatever it be it will be paid, for money is no object. You can teach ; but Miss Haller and I will relieve you of the weightier portion—although, as I have already mentioned, I think, I can be no punctual schoolmaster. I will strive to be as efficient as possible, and keep stated hours as far as may be ; but occasionally I have heavy calls both on my time and attention, and to these all must give way.”

He had stopped to say this as if privately, the children having run before to climb the ruins, and to peep in at the lower windows of the tower.

Prudently avoiding any reference to what Dr. Marlow had

just said, Edith expressed her great pleasure that her sketch of so lovely a scene should have given satisfaction ; and adding that she should be truly happy to pursue art more fully than she had anticipated, yet begged that she might not be wholly restricted to painting. In the direction of form—idealized form—her taste and what talent she might have lay ; and she should still like to model in clay, with a view occasionally of the model being transferred to marble.

“Please yourself, Mrs. Hexham,” Dr. Marlow replied firmly, “and you will please those who employ you. Now we will say no more on this topic, but go forward and see the schoolroom.”

He proceeded ahead as usual, and opening the stout door with a key he had with him, entered the paved and somewhat dark basement ; and then by a winding stone staircase he passed into a room of good size and proportions, the rugged staircase ascending through it to a floor above, and thence to the battlemented roof. It was lighted by four windows recessed in the thickness of the walls ; there was a great fireplace, in which a new grate had been set ; and the old time-worn floor and wainscot had been carefully patched up. A carpet, as also a large and two small tables, chairs, a fender, a bureau, a pair of globes, and some shelves partly filled with books, furnished the place, and gave an air of comfort and habitableness to it. The children, as natural, were curious to see everything ; but the views from the windows pleased them most. That seaward was magnificent ; that to the north gave the sheer and frowning precipice of the headland ; that south looked in the direction of the Grange ; and that east upon the declination of the headland, which, beautified by lawns, terraces, and beds of evergreens, gave across the low and broken ground of the second headland a clear and fine view of the first lake. It was beautiful in the extreme, as was also the nearer foreground of the

castle gardens. Where the precipice began, the park wall, leaving terraces and lawny slopes, began to bend towards it, and at length meeting it, rose high and rapidly—leaving, however, within, a considerable length of precipice of varying height, down the face of which ran a flight of narrow zigzag steps cut in the solid rock. At the foot, and near where the rock met the wall, was a small iron-grated door, with another door answering to it in the wall itself, and opening amidst the ruins of the fort and not far off the tower. It was very evident that the fort and its surrounding buildings had once afforded protection to this side of the castle, and that when these had fallen into ruin, and the wild surrounding land had been brought into cultivation, the park wall had been built.

Whilst Edith was admiring the lovely view, the boys, with the restlessness of children, had returned to the window, from whence the rock-steps were fully seen. They wondered how many steps there were, and if they would be hard to climb. They thought not ; and Walter Marlow, the elder nephew, appealed to his uncle.

"I have never been down or up them," was the answer : "it is never worth while risking one's neck when an easier way is at hand."

"Is there an easier way, uncle?" asked Harold.

"Yes." And this was the only answer vouchsafed.

"It must be through that iron door," whispered Walter : "the Doctor is very short on the matter ; but look as I do, and you can see the steps within, and no doubt they lead into the heart of the castle."

"We shall soon find out when we come here to school," said Arthur ; "I will soon be over the wall, and see for myself."

"But you mustn't, Arthur," spoke Freda ; "we must never approach the castle. Lady Clare expressly forbids it."

"We'll see," said Arthur and Walter in a breath ; and then

perceiving that Dr. Marlow and Mrs. Hexham were ascending the winding staircase to the room above, they followed too. It possessed much fewer windows than the room below, and being filled with old stores of every kind,—furniture, damaged pictures, small cannon, boxes, and a thousand other long-unused things,—looked disordered and gloomy in the extreme. Here the children stayed to peer about them, while their elder companions continued their way to the roof, from whence the view over land and sea was very fine, although the headland shut out a considerable portion of the first lake.

“To see these lower lakes in their full beauty,” said Dr. Marlow, “you must round the headland, cross the little bay,—and for this the tide will serve to-morrow about eleven o’clock,—then go over the sloping turf of the second headland, and the scene will come before you in all its rare and almost unparalleled loveliness. The castle seems to stand farther away than it really does, the park wall is almost hidden in trees, the other lakes are seen winding away till lost amidst the distant hills; the whole conveying the impression of mute loneliness and mystery which is felt but cannot be described.”

“We are all going in the morning, Dr. Marlow,” replied Edith. “I had already inquired of Denis the way, but waited till all the children were together, so that they might share the pleasure with me.”

Dr. Marlow then pointed out various spots of interest, described the wild, yet lovely country which lay beyond, and advised her, when the children deserved and needed a holiday, to take them here and there, and if they desired it, Denis could always accompany them.

Edith, thanking Dr. Marlow, replied she would; and then, as the sun began to decline, they all returned to the foot of the tower, and Dr. Marlow, locking the door, bade them

good evening. He stayed till they were out of sight, and then, opening the door in the park wall, passed through it and was gone.

Willing to reach home by the nearer way—that by the wooded post-road at the rear of the Grange—and never having yet seen the chief entrance to the castle, Edith, followed by her little band of happy children, and pretty Lufy, whose delight at these wonderful walks was extreme, skirted the park wall, and then gaining higher ground, struck into the road which had brought them to the tower. It crossed a wide expanse of heathery common, and met the post-road winding down the hills, and into which the lane that led from the Grange debouched. This post-road was, as Edith recollected, the one they had travelled by from the distant town. She had observed it again that morning, when meeting the children; the lane running by the Grange entering it at some little distance beyond the latter place. Thus the entrance to the castle, being placed on a somewhat high and open expanse, came presently in view. Great gates, and a lodge on either side flanked it; and from these a noble carriage way, bordered by luxuriant shrubberies, wound up to a battlemented entrance to the castle itself. Some distance to the east of the lodge gates, and much encompassed by the woods which sloped down from the heights above, appeared a few outlying cottages, stables, and farm buildings, with just here and there a glimpse into the uninhabited expanse of wild nature lying round and about the lakes.

At length they reached the lane leading by the Grange. To the left were the woods, to the right came prettily timbered fields, with sweet old paths, then the Grange, orchard and garden—these sided towards the sea—with the remnant of the fine old avenue already spoken of. At one time, it was said, this avenue—which seaward was bounded by a narrow

belt of trees extending to the rocks about the fort—stretched as far as the castle heights, but much of it had been cut down about forty years previously, to give space for the erection of the park wall and entrance gates.

For the first time that night the children used their play-room ; and though Lucy, Walter, and Harold were tired, they had some great fun with the rest. At half-past nine they had supper, and after it prayers ; and then came bed. Her duties thus over for the day, Edith gladly hastened to the drawing-room. It had been a day of fatigue and unusual excitement, and she was glad to have a quiet hour before retiring to rest. Thinking and reading, she sat till nearly twelve o'clock ; when, just as she was making ready to extinguish the lamps and go upstairs—for the housekeeper and maids had been long in bed—she heard what seemed to be human footsteps on the lawn beneath the windows. Starting up, Lufra began to bark vehemently, and still more loudly when some one quickly and excitedly rapped at the nearest window. By nature courageous, Edith opened the shutter, and there stood the same old woman who had addressed her in the morning. If her manner was pitiful and entreating then, it was far more so now. Great tears rolled down her furrowed cheeks ; she wildly raised her hands to heaven, and then clasped them, as though in prayer. Her words were the same ; only more passionately and loudly spoken.

Making a sign for the poor old woman to go round to the porch, Edith stepped upstairs to the housekeeper's room, and apologizing for disturbing her, told her of the visitor below. Forbes had no knowledge of such a person, but saying she would call Denis, hastened to throw on some covering. When Denis came downstairs, and Edith and he opened the porch door, they found the old woman praying before it. Rising, and seeing Denis, she repeated her

vehement entreaties. He understood her words readily, for he spoke the Irish tongue.

"She says," he interpreted to Edith, "that an angel of a little child is dying of cold and fever in one of the great caves on the shore, and that, to save its life, she wants Dr. Marlow to visit it. He will, she's sure, for he's a good gentleman, and for his help her prayers shall bless him."

"And cannot you ask him?" said Edith. "Do!—go at once. Say the case is urgent, and how obliged I shall be if he can ease this poor old woman's troubled heart."

Without a word, Denis went away to consult the housekeeper. He returned, sooner than might be expected, habited in his old frieze coat, and bidding the old woman wait at a certain point on the sea-shore, hurried off by way of the lane. Edith, when she had seen that all was safe, retired to her room, though not to bed. Her feelings were touched, her sympathy aroused. In less than an hour she saw the Doctor and the old woman pass along the sands—the latter, at a tottering run, keeping pace with the firm and rapid steps of the manly Englishman.

In the morning the housekeeper made no comments, nor did Mrs. Hexham question her as to how Dr. Marlow had been aroused, or what, if she knew, had been the result of his visit. There was much to see to: her band of happy children to make breakfast for, then to go with them to the schoolroom, to plan a few simple lessons and hear Lucy play. As her uncle had said, the little maid had a delicate ear and touch, and having been well taught, her nicely-played tunes gave pleasure to Mrs. Hexham and the other girls.

A little before eleven o'clock, they had all the exquisite delight of setting off to see the lakes—the boys carrying a telescope and some luncheon, and Lufy running before, or barking at the waves as they ran in and washed her feet.

The pretty favourite could not as yet comprehend the sea ; the great waves frightened her, the smaller ones teased her, as, following her steps, they ran swifter than she could along the shore.

Rounding the castle headland by a broad belt of encircling sands—a belt much narrower when the tide was in, and often in winter time, and when great storms prevailed, wholly obliterated, so that mighty waves leapt up and touched the topmost rocks—they reached the little bay, now dry but for a few pools of salt water in the hollows. Stretched obliquely across was a firm, dry road, its sands crisp and sparkling in the sun, and prettily indented with the wavy ripples of the recent tide. This they followed, and reaching the turfy decline of the higher headland, saw before them the grandest imaginable combination of the wild and peaceful in nature.

A shore, which stretched away in most irregular outline, was broken far out to sea by rugged and fantastic rocks, heaped together in the wildest possible confusion, and amidst which great waves boiled and surged, leapt and ran, with awful and ceaseless fury. Far in the distance this wild sublimity of the forces of nature apparently increased, for great and fantastic headlands rose higher and higher ; and yet, high as they rose, the swell of the mighty ocean rose with them, and in places overleapt their heights. Bleak mountains formed a background, and these, in their sterile loneliness and grandeur, stood like a dark and impenetrable wall against the sky.

On this nearer portion of the shore, before the mighty ruggedness of the coast-line began, a narrow belt of sand merged by degrees into a low thymy upland of great beauty. Here the arbutus and bog oak flourished ; and this acclivity, rounding itself over in gentle swells, sloped down for about half a mile towards the first of the chain of lakes, which wound away till lost, like a silvery cord, in the mysterious

distances of partly wooded, partly turf-clad hills. This first and largest lake, curving east for a considerable distance, then rapidly narrowed, and entered by a mere streamlet into a second and smaller lake. The shore on the northern side rose gradually by long and gently swelling uplands towards a great extent of woods—these sometimes descending far towards the shore, and to the rear stretching away till lost to sight in the sterile range of mountains already spoken of.

After surveying either scene—the terrible and peaceful—and almost recoiling from the savage grandeur and obvious dangers of the shore, the children and Mrs. Hexham descended to the lake, and rounding it, gained its margin—that opposite the castle. Along this they proceeded slowly, every step bringing in view some new and exquisite scene. In one place nothing broke the clear expanse of water—half a mile at least in width; further away a little promontory of low rocks varied the lake by advancing far into it; and here and there small rocky islets, clad with trees, rose just above the water. At length, where the lake curved, and, losing sight of the ocean, lay well hidden by the mingled shadows of wood and hill, was seen a small island, of such extraordinary beauty as to realize the vision of the great English poet when he wrote,—

“ There was a little lawnly islet
By anemone and violet,
Like mosaic, paven !
And its roof was flowers and leaves,
Which the summer's breath enweaves,
Where nor sun, nor showers, nor breeze,
Pierce the pines and tallest trees,
Each a gem engraven.
Girt by many an azure wave,
With which the clouds and mountains pave
A lake's blue chasm.”

It lay about three hundred yards from the shore, and, picturesquely irregular in shape, had a surface of about an acre. This was varied by rounded hillocks, through which meandered a pretty rivulet, luxuriantly bordered by all the choicest flowers of spring—knots of primroses lying thick beneath the shadow of the arbutus shrubs, and violets tricking out the green of the sward with a flush of purple. On the side towards the middle and deeper portion of the lake, was a low fringe of lichen-covered rocks, as though to shut out the secrets of this pretty islet from gazers on the further shore. Some windows in a more modern part of the castle commanded it, and this was all.

The water of the lake was, generally speaking, singularly deep and clear, its shallower portion lying between the island and the shore on which Edith and the children stood. Here it was not more than from four to six feet deep, and apparently at some remote period there had been an artificial communication between it and the shore, for long rows of blackened piles could be seen imbedded in the bottom of the lake—some mere stumps, and others rising to almost the level of the water.

The children were delighted with this lonely and lovely spot; and Edith, admiring it still more than they, resolved that "The Island" should be the subject of her second picture. Arthur and Walter wanted sadly to test their power of walking without their shoes from one to another of the highest piles, but Edith shook her head gravely, and then both boys and girls wished they had a boat.

"I really wish so," said Mrs. Hexham; "I should like to see it as much as you do, children. Well, we will consult old Denis when we get home. Boats are surely kept for use upon these lakes."

As they were thus debarred from reaching the island, they kept along the shore to about as far as the middle of the

second lake, each step they took revealing some new and rare combination of exquisite scenery. Here it was other islands in groups or singly, there it was a breadth of forest covering the hills with vernal green ; in one place a mass of shadows had settled down, in another the golden afternoon lent its ethereal glory ; so that in each scene which came before them there was something or another for intense admiration. At length they retraced their steps, and faced the sea. As they drew near to it they sat down to rest. The lake-shore at this point was as richly turfed as any lawn ; hillocks and luxuriant shrubs diversified it, and countless wild flowers lent odour and colour to the fairy scene.

They were all very hungry, for it was just five o'clock ; but such had been their interest and excitement during this exploration that no one hitherto had thought of it. Fortunately they had brought with them an abundance of substantial viands—for the housekeeper had a generous hand—and now they enjoyed their meal and a little repose : the latter not for long, so far as the elder children were concerned, for no sooner had they finished than they bounded away towards a wood in the rear. Lucy and Iole alone remained ; and they, greatly tired, lay down on the crisp soft turf and fell asleep. Edith had thus rest and quiet, both of which she greatly needed.

They had lunched amidst some shrub-crowned hillocks facing the lake ; and as Edith, sitting quietly, looked round on the lovely scene, she was surprised to find that the spot on which they had all thus incidentally rested commanded a full view of one of the principal fronts of the castle. Compared with the rest, it was evidently of modern erection. Along its whole length ran two long lines of magnificent windows, facing the north-west—one line just raised above a noble terrace, the other at an altitude which clearly indicated

that the rooms they lighted were lofty and of fine proportion. The upper windows were double, as though to shut out the storms of winter. Beneath them ran a spacious and handsome balcony, supported by stonework richly wrought, in keeping with the general architecture of the castle. In either line most of the windows were open ; and where this was the case draperies of the costliest silk, moved gently by the wind, showed their massive folds and the changing effects of the evening light which played upon them. Within, the same costliness and luxury seemed to prevail. The edges of rich carpets, chairs and couches could be just seen ; some of the balconies were filled with the finest exotics, others with tall vases of the rarest oriental porcelain ; and beyond, just here and there, could be caught the dim outline of walls covered by pictures, or else great ranges of book-lined presses and shelves. The lower suite of rooms seemed to include a library and dining-room—the upper, drawing-rooms, ante-chambers, and a gallery of art.

From the fine terrace stretching along the lower suite of rooms, sloped a far-descending lawn, much sheltered from observation by shrubs variously disposed, yet not so wholly hidden but that here and there a garden seat peeped out ; and Edith, as she looked more and more curiously, saw distinctly that one was occupied by a lady, who, from her dress and general outline, she concluded to be Lady Mary Clare. She was using her fingers in some light work, and one of the dogs Edith had seen with Dr. Marlow lay stretched at her feet.

Whilst Mrs. Hexham thus looked, two other ladies came very slowly along the terrace, and, approaching the seat, the one who was led or supported sat down. The other newcomer, then drawing a portable garden chair towards her, sat down also, and producing a book, began apparently to read to both. Lady Mary went on with her work ; but,

the other sat as though blind, or incapacitated by bodily infirmity.

Whilst this was the scene in a nook of the sequestered lawn, Edith's attention was attracted to the upper line of windows by some one stepping out on to a balcony. As the rays of the setting sun fell strongly on the figure, she could not distinguish very accurately, though she was assured it was that of a man, and apparently Dr. Marlow. Her curiosity thus stimulated, she was wishing for a nearer and clearer view, when all at once she recollected the old telescope Arthur had brought with him. It had been one of his uncle Hexham's, and she had given it to him a year or two before. Having never tested its merits, she had only the recollection that Arthur had pronounced it "capital"; so looking to see if he had unswung it with the satchel of provisions, she saw it lying on the grass not five yards off. Taking it up, and sheltering herself still more within the shrubs, she fitted its focus, and looked. She then saw distinctly that her judgment had been correct. The figure was that of Dr. Marlow. After stroking his heavy beard for some moments, as though lost in thought, he raised his left hand, in which was a small glass, and with the other dropped some liquid into it from a bottle, and then returned within. A few minutes afterwards he was again by the window: this time he drew an easy chair thereto. On this he sat down; and as he did so, an elderly servant dressed in black brought something and gave to him, and this another glance showed her was a letter-bag. She then recollected that letters from Dublin reached Morr about five o'clock, and it was now about that hour. She could see Dr. Marlow open the bag and sort out a large number of letters. Some he returned to the bag, and that to the servant; others he placed in the servant's hand; the rest he retained, and laying them on a small table beside him, opened and read them one by one—

and, if the movement of his lips at a distance so considerable was indication sufficient, to some one not far off. Meanwhile the same elderly servant reappeared upon the lawn, and approaching Miss Haller, held forth a salver, on which was a portion of the new-come letters. In pursuance evidently of a duty, like that of Dr. Marlow's, she proceeded to open them, and probably read them to the ladies. But at this point Edith had to close her observations abruptly : she heard the children's voices, and looking in the direction of the woods, saw the boys running swiftly towards her, whilst Freda followed more slowly. Feeling at once the policy of not exciting Arthur's curiosity by letting him see that she had been using the telescope, or that from where she sat the more private portion of the castle could be so well observed, she rose, and taking up the telescope and other things, aroused the little girls, and moved onwards in the direction the boys were coming. She soon met them, breathless and excited.

"Edith," said Arthur, in his usual hasty way, "look there, where the woods narrow down to the rocks on the shore, and where there is a little creek !" He pointed with his hand, and Mrs. Hexham looked.

"Well," he continued, "just at the head of the creek—though you don't see it from here, on account of the trees—is a little mud cabin, and in it we found an old man and his wife. He speaks a little English, though with "ochis" and "wids" and "plases" enough ; and being fisherman to the castle and care-taker of the lower lakes, he says he can easily get a boat and ferry us over to the isle this evening. Do let us go ! Let Walter and me run back and tell him to come : he has a boat in some bushes hard by."

"Not this evening, Arthur, certainly ; you are quite unaware how late it is," replied Edith firmly. "Now let us lose no further time in returning home : it is long past our

tea hour, and the housekeeper will be wondering at our absence."

"But you will come with us to-morrow, mamma, won't you?" asked Freda anxiously.

"I think not. And besides, we must none of us visit the isle till we have had Lady Clare's permission. I will ask Miss Haller, or Dr. Marlow. Now let us hasten homewards; it is really growing dusk."

The children were disappointed, but readily obeyed; and soon the little company had rounded the seaward end of the lake. From thence, crossing the low-lying portion of the higher headland, they saw at once the tide was in, and that they must round the little bay, instead of crossing it mid-sands as in the morning. This lengthened their walk considerably. Upon reaching the foot of the headland nearest the Grange, they found the tide had left so narrow a margin that in winter-time or stormy weather it must be obliterated altogether. Involuntarily stopping midway, Edith looked up the sheer and lofty cliffs with something like a shudder.

"God keep us from being here on a winter's night!" she said.

"Mrs. Hexham," replied Walter, "old Mike tells us it is a treacherous coast. The swell of the Atlantic can never be depended on, and in cases of great storms the breakers have, it is said, dashed far over the piled-up rocks, and turned the first and second lakes into a sea. The Grange, too, is not safe, though it lies higher than the bed of the lake."

"Well, we must have no fear," was Edith's answer. "It seems well protected from the storms of winter by the woodland and avenue to the north, and the wooded heights to the east. But let us go on. It is a fine spring night, and it will be time enough to dread the storms of winter when winter has come."

The little party soon reached the Grange, where tea had

long awaited them. After partaking of it, the children went for an hour into their play-room ; and then, when Edith had read prayers, they retired for the night. Wishing to make a little rough sketch from memory of the isle as she had witnessed it that afternoon, with a view to the picture she meant to paint, she repaired to the studio, and gathering her drawing materials together, sat down to work.

As she sketched out the more prominent features of the beautiful scene, her thoughts took wing, and she saw again the castle terrace and its ranges of noble windows.

"There is some mystery in that place," was her consideration. "If Lady Isabel was the one Miss Haller led from the terrace to the seat, she is either blind, or too much an invalid to take that active interest in art which is professed. What can the mystery be? A portion of it, at least, is evident : Dr. Marlow is secretary and medical attendant to some one younger and of more active intellect than the Ladies Clare."

And these thoughts brought to her mind the telescope. "I must put it away," she said to herself, "or I shall have the children using it, and soon knowing more than perhaps they ought to do. I will tell Arthur, what I think will be the truth, that Dr. Marlow might not like to see it used, and that it would be in bad taste to spy about the castle, as though it were the abode of an enemy rather than that of a generous friend."

That night, therefore, before she retired to rest, she locked the telescope up in a book-press in the studio, and this with a resolution never to use it herself or entrust it to the children.

Next morning, just as they had all breakfasted, old Denis came in to say that Lady Mary had sent them each a present ; and the children, wondering what it could be, ran out to the porch, followed by Mrs. Hexham.

It was a present, indeed ! Such a one as delighted their

hearts to the full. It was no less than a shaggy broad-backed pony for each child, with one somewhat larger and more kempt for Mrs. Hexham. Three had saddles, four side-saddles ; and there was quite a sheaf of whips. The groom who had driven them down merely said that Lady Mary had sent them, and that Denis, with the help of a boy, would attend to them ; and added that Miss Haller would drive down in the afternoon and give the little girls a music lesson.

Nothing else would do than that the children must mount at once, and try their respective ponies ; for a ticket was attached to each saddle, with the name of the child to whom it was given was written on it,—and to make identity possible and easy, each pony had a name, and was otherwise sufficiently different from its fellows in colour, mane, shagginess, and so forth, as to foreshadow no difficulty in each one claiming the right animal. At first the two youngest girls were timid to mount ; but the groom and Denis supported them, and, in less than half an hour, they were riding as merrily, if not quite as easily, as the rest. Even Mrs. Hexham tried hers, up and down the adjacent avenue. Its colour was chesnut, its mane, tail, and fetlocks black, and its name “Jove.” When satisfied that its possession would afford her much ease and pleasure, and enable her to make excursions with the children far and wide, she asked the groom to take off the saddle, so that the pony could graze on the adjacent lawn, whilst she otherwise employed her morning. When Jove was thus settled, she went indoors to her work, leaving Denis to take care of the children on a ride along the post-road and the adjacent moor. They did not return much before dinner-time, and then with accounts so wonderful of all Denis had shown them during the ride—of waterfalls, bogs, high cliffs and ruinous places—as to make her wish she had been of their company. However, she promised to ride a

little way with them so soon as Miss Haller had paid her visit.

At the hour appointed the lady came. The coachman drove her down in a little carriage, and she brought with her cakes, books, newspapers, fruit and toys. When thanked, and she had heard of the rapturous delight excited by the arrival of the ponies, she made little of the matter. She merely said that the Ladies Clare had whole droves of such on some of their Irish estates, and that the only trouble involved had been that of mere selection, and then sending them across a wide breadth of country. She added that perhaps through the summer a capacious basket carriage would be added, for one had been sent for from Dublin. Miss Haller then gave the three little girls each a lesson in music ; and these finished, she prepared to go. Beyond this conversation relating to the ponies she had said little ; but now, as Edith attended her to the carriage, she remarked, as she passed the studio door,—

“Have you been painting, Mrs. Hexham? Have you fixed upon the subject of your next landscape?”

“Yes,” replied Edith : “on a lovely isle placed somewhat towards the further end of the first lake. I never before saw a scene so beautiful. It is like a vision of Paradise.”

“It is indeed!” said Miss Haller. “It is the gem of all the many lovely scenes round Morr ; and you have kindly anticipated a very strong desire that it should be transferred to canvas. Please paint it as soon as you conveniently can, and take all necessary pains, for price is no consideration.”

“I have seen the isle but once,” answered Edith ; “though I shall go to it whenever possible, and paint from nature. But I should like to have access to the isle itself. To this I suppose there will be no objection?”

“I fancy not ; but I will consult the Ladies Clare and Dr. Marlow. Old Mike the fisherman would ferry you across :

indeed, when the water is sufficiently low, it can be reached by laying planks along some piling you perhaps observed,-- though it is safer and easier to cross by boat. In summer, when the Ladies Clare have visitors, the isle is used occasionally for picnic parties ; and during the last few years it has been sought out by antiquarian tourists, who consider that in remote ages the piles gave access to a cluster of lake dwellings. Be this as it may, paint the island if you please."

CHAPTER IV.

HOUSE-BUILDING.

ON returning that same evening from a ride into the woods with the children, Edith found a note from Dr. Marlow, which briefly informed her that he should begin school on the following Monday, and that on that morning at ten o'clock he should expect to find all the children assembled in the old tower. Denis would previously attend, and place all things in readiness ; and for the three hours he would stay, he should expect attention, obedience, and industry. The matter thus arranged, Edith resolved for the rest of the week to devote her mornings to their discipline and preparation ; and after dinner, sending them away for a ride or a ramble in the woods, go by herself to the lonely shores of the lake, and there make beginning of what she hoped would be an effective picture. She without hesitation chose early sunset as the time under which to transfer to canvas the exquisite marvels of the solitary scene. It suited best its mute loneliness, its mystery, and dreamy stillness. The waters stole away into the hidden wildness of the hills ; the sun cast its shadows and went down behind the sea to lighten other climes ; and thus, in their expression of silence, solemnity, and mystery, earth and sky would on canvas, as in nature, be one.

The next morning, therefore, she began her task. She heard the boys and Freda their lessons in Latin and rudi-

mental French and German ; they all read and wrote in English, and did sums, finishing with a lesson in geography. Modern languages, with music, were to be left to Miss Haller's care, who was to begin her lessons in the former when next she visited the Grange ; Dr. Marlow would be their instructor in classics, mathematics, and history. Her lessons would thus be preparatory only, and given chiefly to the youngest children : therefore with the next week her true liberty would come—the liberty of devoting herself to the labours of divine art.

Thus after dinner, when they had ridden away in the care of Denis to visit some fine scenery a few miles up amidst the hills, she set off with her painting materials to the lake, and without any other companion than her favourite Luffy. She knew she should work best in solitude ; she always did so ; and as she wished greatly to excel in transferring a lovely and perfect image of the island to her canvas, she resolved that nothing should be wanting to mar her purpose. It was at all times a great intellectual treat to be alone ; and the presence of so many children during the greater part of every day would render this privilege of occasionally stealing away for quiet labour a matter of peculiar and intense enjoyment.

Rounding the headland, as also the inner bay—for the tide was coming in—she crossed the low level of the next headland, and gained the seaward ending of the first lake. Then crossing towards the woods, which for some space bore down to the wild, rocky and surf-washed shore, she came in a short time, and at some distance from the lake, to a little salt-water creek, which, winding in between the scattered masses of rock and rocky islets, was formed by the surplus water of the breakers which dashed amidst them. This creek ran inland from the rocks for about a quarter of a mile, and then terminated in a shallow pool. A portion of this

was intersected by piling, and so formed, as was evident, a preserve for fish. Two little flat-bottomed boats were fastened to a stake, some nets and other fishing gear dried in the sun on the low piling; and about a hundred yards beyond the pool, just within the shadow of the wood, and slightly elevated on a flat and wide-spread rock, was a cabin of true Irish type. The peat-stack, the dunghill, the pig and cocks and hens were there, and just without the door burnt a large peat-fire. Over this was an iron triangle fixed in the ground, and from it dangled a great pot, watched apparently by an old woman, who sat knitting on a three-legged stool hard by. A man somewhat older lay stretched on the ground not far off, with a large creel basket beside him, and his pipe in his mouth. The picturesqueness of the whole scene was heightened by the effect of the grey smoke from the fire, which curled away rearward to the wood, and lost itself in a green wilderness of boughs and leaves.

Climbing to this platform, by the rocky steps which led from the sandy shore of the little pool, Edith advanced to the fire, and thus saw, as she came closer, that the pot was filled with shell-fish—crabs, lobsters, and cray-fish of great size. With the natural courtesy of the Irish, the old couple rose, as soon as they saw her, and made what they called their “riverinces,”—that is to say, the old man his bow, and his wife her humble curtsy.

“And shure I’ve been expecting yer ladyship all the day,” said Mike, hurrying to speak. “The swate lady, Miss Haller, sint me word ye’d need to be crossing to the purtiest isle in the lake.”

“Yes, Mike; I am going to make a picture of the island from the shore, but should first like to visit the island itself. Perhaps you will row me across, and then wait. I’ll not detain you long, for I shall wish to return to the shore, choose my place, and catch the first lights of sunset.”

"I'll be plased to go wid ye at once, me lady, for I've got to fitch a salmon from a presarve hard by, and the boat's not far off in some bushes. To-night I couldn't be staying at all, for the skep of fish is needed for the castle dinner. Ye see, another time I might sind little Pat wid the basket, but Misthress Haller has bid him help Masther Denis wid the ponies and do other work at the Grange. Pat's plased, me lady, for he earns a thrifle ; and Misthress Forbes gives him good mate and drink."

"Then the bright-eyed boy who came to the Grange yesterday is——"

The old woman interrupted by breaking in with the words

"Me grandson, me lady—the son of our poor Mike, who, pace be wid his soul, is wid the saints in heaven. He died in the times of the grate famine, me lady. Me and the poor masther lost four beautiful boys, and two swate dochters ; purty creatures they. Me youngest dochter wint away across the sea jist as we lift the counthry we come from, and it's long since we heard of her. Our big boy was married, but his widdy died soon afther from throuble and fever ; and Pat, me little Pat, be all the Blessed Mother and the saints have lift us. A bright boy is Pathrick, me lady, as you'll find him : a 'cute boy, taking wonderfully to his book. Fit for a priest he, as a gintlemin that once came to see the beautiful lakes sid to us."

Whilst the old woman thus talked, Mrs. Hexham was greatly struck by a something in her voice and look. What it was she could not define—whether likeness or recollection ; but it seemed as though she had not only seen the face before, but heard the voice. She was a comely old woman of sixty or more ; and, still erect and active, was a fine specimen of the kindly, voluble Irish peasant woman in the decline of life.

But she had now to turn to the great pot, for the fish

within had boiled long enough, as signs to her practised eye indicated. Fetching a long-pronged fork from the cabin, she drew out, with great dexterity, shell-fish so fine as to be worthy of the table of a London alderman. These she cast one by one into the great skep, which presently she set to drain by tilting it up against a stone. As these operations took time, they were scarcely ended when old Mike, who had disappeared a few minutes before, came forth from the cabin a little smartened up, in an old frieze coat and battered hat. He then, twitching the latter, and with a polite "At yer sarvice, me lady," stepped down to the little pool, took up an oar from others resting against the rock, and lifting it on to his shoulder, led the way into a beautiful sylvan path, which, after winding round the undulations of the wood, sloped down to the lake. Edith had thus only time to wish the kindly pleasant old woman a brief "good day," and add thereto a promise that she would visit her again ere long.

As thus the old fisherman and Edith traversed the half-mile which lay between the woods and the lake, she learnt from what he said that he and his wife had not been more than two years at Morr. They had been transplanted from the sea-coast of Wicklow by an agent of the Ladies Clare : the old fisherman at Castle Morr having died, after many years' service, and there being no one in that remote and lonely neighbourhood fitted to take his place, old Mike, as a man of known skill in all kinds of fishing, and long a tenant of the Ladies Clare, had been chosen.

"And it was a fine day for me and the ould misthress, me lady, that the priest, Father O'Reilly, spoke of our character, and the agint, a rael gintlemin, wrote a letther about us to the grate ladies, spaking of us—the saints be praised—as ould and faithful sarvants. So we came over the counthry, me lady, wid our bits o' goods, and our little Pat, and found the nice place ye see here. Tin shillings a wake we have,

wid a bit more for the fish I'm catching, and the nice cabin ye see, and a cow, and wood and pate for the gitting, and a beautiful pig. And niver we ill a minnit, but the good Dochter Marlow comes down and sees us and sinds us physic, and the Misthress Haller—a swate kind gintlewoman she is—orders the housekeeper to let little Pat have the bist the house affords for the fitching. Eh ! me lady, the ould misthress and me have had dark days—sorra upon 'im—but, the saints be praised, they've come to an inding, as it sames. We only wish sometimes, when Pat be in bed, and we sit lonely by the fire, we could see the swate face of our darlint Mary, that wint away long ago ; we seem to want her, the tinder dochter that she was."

"We all want something, Mike," replied Mrs. Hexham, earnestly. "Do the best we may, we cannot make life perfect. All we can do is to accept our lot cheerfully, do our duty, and strive to keep well in the sight of God."

"Ye say well, me lady. I'm the last man to be repining, but ye see the childer hold a place in the heart for iver and iver."

They were now on the shore of the lake, just where a thicket of birch and alder trees dipped down to the water. Entering its shade, old Mike soon reappeared, dragging after him a small boat. When he had brought it to a rude landing staith, formed of stakes driven into the gravel of the shore, he baled out a mingled mass of leaves and water, and settling a plank on which Mrs. Hexham could rest her feet, assisted her to step in. He then entered, and sitting down, reached the isle by a few strokes of the oar he had brought.

If it looked from the shore like a vision in a poet's dream, it was that vision realized when trodden by one who had all an artist's exquisite perception of the beautiful in nature. Soft to the tread as velvet, it was decked with the choicest flowers of spring, amidst which the wild anemones waved perceptibly

their pink-white fragile coronals in the soft breeze. On the borders of the rivulet, and in the recesses of the rocky edge, which in one place fringed the lake, a myriad clumps of primroses lay their contrast of soft sulphur tints against the green around them. Beyond lay the blue, slightly-rippled waters—lighter here, darker there—till, gradually narrowing in width, they ended, but to begin again in the second lake, which, shaping itself to the bases of the hills, lost itself in their recesses. The opposite shore, so far as she could see, was partly wild park-land, partly forest—the forest sloping upwards to a range of desolate, rocky, heath-clad mountains.

The surface of the isle was so roughly undulating and broken in places, as to suggest the idea that beneath the turf lay ruins of some kind or another ; and where its shore was level and most open to the deepest part of the lake were various-sized mounds of somewhat conical form. The greater portion of them were covered with turf and small plants ; but a few had been disturbed by human agency, or else worn away by winter storms. Thus bared to the weather, they were seen to be formed of a mingled mass of bones, shells, and rubbish gathered and left there by human hands. Edith had previously observed these mounds, both high up on the sea-shore, and on the seaward end of the lake, though in a less perfect condition than these on the isle. It thus at once occurred to her that the strange-looking heaps before her were the "*Kjökken möddings*" of the Danish antiquaries, or as we should say in English "*kitchen middens*,"—that is, receptacles for the refuse of the kitchen ; though at the remote period at which they were formed, such things as kitchens were unknown. Even cookery went no further, probably, than a rude broiling of great masses of flesh on the embers of large wood fires. The savage races who roamed these western isles—then unknown to all but the adventurous seamen of the ports of Phœnicia and southern Gaul—lived upon such wild beasts

as they could hunt down in the forests, and upon the shell-fish then common in estuaries and lakes. Of these fishing places, some would be more easily accessible and prolific than others, and thus attractive for temporary settlement to wandering tribes, who never removing the refuse of their feasts from the spots where they took place, the accumulations became, in the course of time, such as are still found in remote parts of northern Europe. They are indicative of an intense degree of human barbarism. Another peculiarity of those most remote ages was lake-dwellings. These were huts raised upon piles in the sufficiently deep water of lakes, rivers, and sometimes estuaries; and at such distance from the nearest shore as rendered them inaccessible to beasts of prey, and to still more cruel enemies in savage men. Platforms or landing stages—so constructed of piling as to be inaccessible when necessary—led to the shore. Traces of lake dwellings are still extant in Switzerland and the remote parts of Scotland and Ireland; and these were used, it is conjectured, not only in ordinary times, but in those of war and danger, as places of refuge for women and children, and for the storage of corn, cattle, and other valuable things. That they were sometimes burnt down, either through accident, or the malice of enemies who had gained access thereto, is evident from the traces of blackened grain still found among the piling:

The old fisherman moved his boat round the isle as Edith traversed it; and now, as she stopped to look still closer at a mound more broken and scattered than the rest, he said,—

“That grate hape, me lady, is jist the one the gintlemin which came last pulled most about. Eh! what a pother they made over it—raking and scraping half a blissed day for bones and teeth, and horns and shells, and sich-like things. They sid it was a wonderful hape—the richest they’d iver found; and whin by-and-by they pulled out a grate stag’s

horn, all branched like the bough of a tree, they were as plased as school-boys, for they sid it sit a grate question at rest. But begar, me lady, I couldn't be at the understandthing of thim at all at all, for bones and shells and sich-like things are common enough to find any day."

"Not such as these, Mike," said Mrs. Hexham; "and the antiquaries made probably some important discovery. Refuse heaps of this kind have, in recent years, revealed a history of deep interest and significance. They have aided in proving, what was long suspected by scientific men, that man has had a long chronology on earth. Time in his case, as in many others, has to be reckoned by thousands of years; and in the beginning, we are now well assured, he was a mere wandering savage, living on roots, berries, and shell-fish, and knowing not, till he gradually discovered them, the use of fire, the art of cooking, or the comfort of clothing—even though only of skins. His habits were those of a wild beast, or he would not have left these refuse heaps; yet their utility in the eye of modern knowledge is great, for they not only reveal the kinds of food on which these pre-historic races lived, but also what classes of fish and animals have since then become extinct."

"No doubt ye're right, me lady," replied simple Mike, "for ye talk jist as the gintlemin did ache to the other. And I should tell ye, me lady, that whin one sort o' work was done, they took to another. For, making me row thim round and round the blissed isle, they poked below the water wid grate stakes I cut for 'im, for some of 'im thought it was founded on piles or drifted wood. But one gintlemin, wid the gratest wit among 'im, sid that the little rivulet, and the spring that fed it, were proof agin it; and they sid—"

"That the isle had been built upon in remote ages," interrupted Edith.

"Jist so, me lady; though not sartain in what way."

"I conjectured so," added Edith. Then moving away, she sat down on a hillock beside the little rivulet, and looked west to Castle Morr. There it stood, in all the sunny tranquil beauty of the afternoon, its grand terrace windows and the tier above looking north-west across the lake ; whilst facing her—amongst other windows, some new, some old—was one more conspicuous than the rest, for it stood prominently forward, and looking eastward up the lake, had a fair view of the isle, though probably not far beyond, for there were intercepting bushes, scattered fragments of rock, and the flexure of the water as it wound away. The window was in a tower of large proportions, and the room or rooms within were apparently on the same level as the terrace frontage. But these rooms might be unused, for the upper windows were shut and closely blinded. As the isle could be thus portionally seen, if desire were, Edith learnt that she might well leave its representation to some future season.

Gathering a bunch of flowers, so as to prove to the children that the words of the poet were literally true, and that the isle was

"By anemone and violet,
Like mosaic, paven,"

and resolving that one afternoon early the following week they should have the delight of visiting it, she returned to the shore. Then rewarding and dismissing old Mike, who promised to be ready to ferry the children over on the following Monday afternoon, she took up her painting materials and proceeded along the shore to select a spot. It was soon found ; for Nature had, as it were, selected it. A turfy bank, just touched by the shadows of the woods, and no more, gave an unparalleled view of the transcendent landscape. Islets, water, the dreamy distance of the second lake till lost in misty shadow, were all there ; while, just a little

to the left of the opposite foreground, was a gravelly spit, on the extremity of which cattle stood lazily drinking. The first signs of the waning day began to show, and the sun, softened from its refulgence, spread far away and touched the deepest shadows. After more than an hour's examination of various points of view, she found none which combined so many advantages and beauties. She therefore set to work, and painted till the sun had settled down, and the cattle had left the shore and returned to the hills. She then hastened home, and spent the evening with the children, who were delighted with her description of the isle, though they expressed great disappointment at not having been with her. But her promise in relation to the following Monday in some degree reconciled them.

In this manner the remainder of the week passed—lessons, rides, and rambles occupying the children's days ; and one further afternoon Edith repaired to the lake and painted till the sun went down. On the Saturday evening Miss Haller drove over, bringing presents and messages from the Ladies Clare, and employing some hours in giving the children lessons in French, German, and music. Although she was quiet in her demeanour, and reserved on all points relative to the castle and its inmates, they liked her much ; and the more Edith saw of her, the more she was rejoiced that so good and sensible a lady was likely to be a friend. The morrow was Sunday ; and repairing to the shore, Edith and the children sat down on the smooth sands, the sun shining over land and sea, and the waves just in that part, scarcely touched by the light breeze, flowing and ebbing with a gentle murmur. It was an exquisite spot—one just fitted for religious service ; so, having brought the requisite books, Edith read the day's lessons, and after them one of Tillotson's sermons ; the works of this great divine, with those of South, Barrow, and Butler, being, with many other English classics, on the

bookshelves at the Grange. In the evening they rambled into the woods, and upon their return Edith played and the children sang some favourite hymns and anthems.

At length the morrow came, and all were up and had breakfasted betimes. As she had so much farther to go than the children, Edith mounted Jove, and by the aid of two leathern straps managed to suspend her portfolio and the other appliances of an artist to the pommel of the saddle. Wild with health and glee, the children ran on before—occasionally diverging to the shore, or else to the rocky grass-clad acclivities which led to the belt of woodland and its avenue behind the Grange. By half-past nine they had all reached the tower; and the door being unlocked, the children ran upstairs, and soon returning, reported old Denis was there, and that everything was in readiness to begin school, even to ink in the inkstands. Considering that, as this was the day of commencement, it might be proper for her to await Dr. Marlow's arrival, Edith dismounted, and whilst the boys tethered Jove to the stanchion of a ruined doorway, she went up to the schoolroom, and wishing Denis "good-morning," sat down. The boys soon passed through on their way to the roof, whither they had already led the girls; and Edith and the old man could hear their happy voices through the open casements. The latter paused in his task of settling an old baize-covered form even with a table, and said, in his pleasant, gentle way,—

"Youth's a nice time, me lady: no troubles or sorrows."

"Yes, Denis, and one that can never come again. And yet God is very good to us. Each season in life, as the seasons in nature, has blessings annexed to it, which give happiness if we accept them and use them rightly."

"Ye say thrue, me lady; I find it so. I am gitting an ould man, and, like other mortal crathurs, I've had my troubles. I was sarvant many years to me Ladies Clare; but me wife

died, and me only child, a son, wint to say, and ye see, I couldn't bear under it, and me mind and heart wint away for a time. But I got betther, and now the good Misthress Haller and the noble Dochter have placed me at the Grange to wait upon yer, and do the bist I can for the childer's and yer ladyship's happiness."

"I'm sure you do, Denis. So far as I have seen, you are a faithful, worthy servant. The children are already quite fond of you. I only fear that the care of this old tower will add much, too much, to your duties."

"Not a bit, me lady. As Misthress Haller says, the putting this room to rights once a wake will suffice. The key is to be hidden under a certain stone, and there the young gintlemin will find it whin they come to their lessons. That's little enough, me lady, specially whin I've Pathrick to help me."

"You're very good, Denis. You and Forbes make our lives very happy at the Grange."

"Little thanks to us, Misthress Hexham. The grate Ladies order it, and the good Dochter says to plase you is to plase him."

"Does Dr. Marlow say this?"

"Yis, me lady, it's earnest thruth. He don't say much, but he thinks you a wonderful crathur, making picthurs as you do. And we see it for ourselves, for didn't we see the picthur that wint to the castle, and didn't it plase—" He stopped abruptly, as though he had said too much.

"Whom?" asked Edith.

Denis was on his guard now. He replied, "The Ladies Clare,"—then listening, as though the children called, he settled the chairs rightly, and hurried up the winding steps of stone to where they were.

As he ascended higher and higher, and the sound of his footsteps died away, other sounds met her ear—for everything was intensely still about the tower. A distant door was

closed heavily, and some footsteps making even descent down a very long flight of steps came nearer and nearer. Then came a pause, and a key grated as in a lock. As it turned, it was stopped abruptly, and one voice and then another spoke. Looking towards the window through which the sounds came, Edith saw two figures within the iron grated door opposite the park wall, and which, as already said, barred access to a very long flight of steep narrow stone steps leading up within the rocky slope into the castle. One of these persons was Dr. Marlow; the other, as it seemed, the same servant Edith had seen bear the letter-bag towards the balconied window which, with others, overlooked the lake.

The latter said—as though, having forgotten some duty assigned to him, he had hastily followed the Doctor—“You did not say, sir, which of the two draughts I was to give——” She did not catch the conclusion of the sentence, for it was spoken too low.

The reply was equally lost to the ear. But when given the servant bowed respectfully, and, reascending the steps, was lost to sight. Turning his face towards the gate, Dr. Marlow unlocked it, passed through the opposite door in the park wall, and crossed into the tower, stroking his heavy beard, and lost in thought as he did so. When he entered, Edith, having moved to a window facing the sea, was looking thereon, and admiring its splendour as it rolled shoreward: its huge waves crested by the silvery light of the morning.

He greeted her with unusual cordiality, and she explained that, being on her way to the lake to paint, she had accompanied the children, and thus waited to learn if there were any commands connected with this first day of their graver studies.

He replied not—the only requisites being, as his time was limited, diligence, attention and care; and then he inquired about the picture.

She told him she had commenced it, having painted through two afternoons till sunset, and described the point of view she had chosen.

"At this early stage, it is almost unfair for me to ask to see it. Yet I shall be glad to do so. It must give the isle, but the distance beyond is of more importance. The less it represents the scenery as seen from any of the castle windows the better, for it is for eyes which can never look upon the second lake, or the winding overshadowed distances in which it loses itself."

"I have had this necessity strongly in view," she answered quietly, and suppressing all evidence of curiosity; "it will be the keystone of the whole. Shall I fetch the sketch? The portfolio in which it is, is fastened to the saddle."

"I will." And in a moment he was gone. He as quickly returned, and laying it on the table, undid the portfolio. He examined the sketch with great care, but in silence. At length he said,—

"This is good so far as it goes, but you must have more breadth and distance. It is for a critic—a great critic." He said this, as she thought, with an austerity and in a tone of command scarcely called for by the occasion.

"I am no professed artist, Dr. Marlow," she replied; "and I came here under the impression that I was to teach children rather than paint pictures. I can therefore only work up to the measure of my ability. I am naturally industrious; I wish to oblige: and the results of these you must accept as the best I can do."

"Pardon me," he said quickly. "In seeking to avoid one extreme, with a man's awkwardness I fall into another. I put on a bear's skin, and it fits ill. But I will come round the lake in the afternoon, and point out the matter more fully. Now let me assist you to your pony."

"Thank you, I can assist myself. Shall I call the children? They are on the battlements with Denis."

"No: let them alone,—they will be down soon enough." So saying, he tied up the sketch, and led the way down the rugged staircase. But though she followed, she had sprung into the saddle before he was aware. Evidently mortified, he replaced the portfolio; and almost before this was done, she had said "good day" and was gone.

He returned as quickly as he could to the old room, and watched her intently, till the pony had rounded the beetling cliff. He then came towards the table, stroking as he did so his heavy beard, and taking his seat, called the children in a loud stern voice. Then looking about the table, to see all was ready, he perceived a small piece of paper. It must have dropped from the portfolio, for on it had been rapidly sketched the spray of an elegant fern, which grew commonly in rocky fissures about the woods. It was gracefully and skilfully touched; but, whether or not for the purpose of returning it, he had placed it in his pocket-book before the children appeared.

As Edith had bidden them, they had taken off their hats, and the girls in addition their jackets, in the old room above; so at once they were ready to sit down to their lessons, and these commenced as soon as the brief greeting was over. Dreading his ordinary austerity, the children had anticipated this morning with no small measure of fear; but to their surprise Dr. Marlow proved to be the kindest and most gentle master. Possessed of great knowledge, he made most things easy to their comprehension, and the morning passed as rapidly as though they had been at play. When he had fixed their lessons for the day after the morrow, and bidden them be diligent, he went his way, passing, as he came, through the door in the park wall, and so through the iron gate to the ancient steps. The children watched him out of sight, and

then the little girls fetched their hats and jackets, and taking their books, ran forward to the Grange. Harold accompanied them ; but Arthur and Walter remained, as Edith had told them to do, to settle the books, close the windows, and lock the door. But they were long about their task, and when they reached home, dinner was just ready. At this Forbes presided ; and as soon as it was over, little Pat bringing the ponies to the door, they all mounted and rode away. Perched up on an old farm horse which usually grazed at freedom on the adjacent moor, Pat soon followed, and this with a basket well filled with luncheon for Edith, and a further meal for the children, who were not to return till sunset. They had a charming ride ; but the two elder boys, lingering behind, questioned the lad as to the castle. Whether his simplicity was feigned or not, he could tell them little, except that the steps which Dr. Marlow descended on his way to the tower were called "The Hundred Steps," and that they led into the middle of the castle.

"What middle?" asked Arthur, again. "Is it a hall, a room, or what?"

"I'll not be knowing it," answered little Pat ; "I go into a grate kitchen whin I go wid the fish, and that's all the likes of me knows."

Thus baffled in their curiosity, the boys rode onward ; and the pretty cavalcade approaching the beautiful lake, saw old Mike awaiting their coming in his boat. When they reached the shore, the ponies were unsaddled and turned loose to graze : there was no danger of their straying away, for having been kindly treated they came at call. This being done, little Pat went onwards with the lunch to where Mrs. Hexham sat at her work, and the children stepping into the boat, old Mike ferried them to the isle, explaining, as they crossed the narrow channel which lay between it and the shore, the use of the ancient piling which just touched the

water. They were all delighted with the isle—the boys especially. They searched every nook and corner, climbed the trees, drank of the little stream, and declared it to be the choicest place they had ever seen.

"We will come here very often, if mamma and old Dr. Grimwig will let us," said Arthur.

"Arthur," interrupted Freda, "you must not let mamma hear you call Dr. Marlow by that name. True, he has usually a peremptory way of speaking, and often he looks awfully cross; but I really begin to think this manner is put on. Only recollect how kind he has been to us this morning. I shall never dread my lessons again."

"Papa always said that uncle was a very kind man," spoke Walter. "If he has changed, I suppose it is through being shut up in this wild old castle, and with its strange old ladies."

"And its Bluebeard's chamber," interrupted Arthur, merrily; "which I mean to see—that's sure."

"And I too," spoke Harold, "though Dr. Grimwig and singing Miss Haller will prevent us if they can. But let us all jump about again. It is a regular Robinson Crusoe's isle, and we'll be as merry as Crusoe was."

"He was never merry," said Freda, quickly; "he was always sighing, poor man—as well he might."

"Yes, till Friday came, and then he was jolly enough. But we won't sigh," laughed Arthur; "and really, now we've broached the subject of Robinson Crusoe, suppose we play his character in earnest: build a house, make its furniture, keep a goat, and do everything for ourselves!"

"Oh how nice!" cried Freda and the two other little girls in a breath.

"Capital," said Walter and Harold: "you shall build the house, Arthur, because we know you like building, and we'll make chairs and tables and dig and plant a garden."

"Jolly!" spoke Arthur; "just the thing to keep us merry, and from growing weary with this dull place."

"It isn't dull!" said Freda, a little indignantly; "it is a wonderful, beautiful place. As mamma said only this morning, it was a great piece of good fortune to have this lovely change, and find such kind, generous, thoughtful friends."

"Well, I won't vex you, Freda, and call it dull again. If Dr. Grimwig will let us build a house, and play Robinson Crusoe on the isle, I'll call him Dr. Goodpenny, or Dr. Brick, or anything you will. But I think we ought to go now; we've been here quite two hours, and Mike must be tired."

"And mamma perhaps wanting us." Speaking thus, Freda, after a parting leap over the little stream, led the way to the boat, and in a minute or two they were again on the shore. With the speed of fawns they ran onward to the pretty upland where Edith sat, and soon were grouped around her. She had rested after lunch, but now was at work again—making the most of the fine lights of descending evening. They all began to talk, for they had much to tell her about the lessons, and the island, with which they were enraptured; but Freda, who loved Edith dearly and called her "mamma" with all her heart, thought she looked weary, and said so.

"Do I? I have had a nice luncheon and a rest after, and ought not to do so. Perhaps it is the want of my customary cup of tea. If the Grange were not so far, I would send for one."

"If we'd a tea-kettle here," spoke Walter, "we'd soon boil the water. Let us ride to the Grange, and get the things. Forbes will surely have a kettle to spare. Pat can carry it, and we the cups and saucers, and——"

"Oh, do, mamma, let us,—do! do!" they all said in a breath.

"And we could keep all the things here, and you could

have a cup of tea whenever you came to paint, for the bushes would make a capital cupboard in which to store the things. Do ! do let us all go ! ”

“ Well, Forbes might not object—as we cannot be home till it is quite dusk. You, Walter, Arthur and Freda can go, but Harold, Lucy and Iole had better remain. They can gather sticks for our gipsy-fire. Now start at once, and take care how you ride, for children so easily fall into mischief.”

“ Oh, we'll take care,” said Arthur, as he led the way at a wild run towards the spot where Pat and his grandfather rested on the grass. “ And we'll be back before you think we can be there.”

And it was evident he would keep his word, for in a few minutes he, Freda and Walter were mounted, and led by Pat on the old horse, were rounding the lake towards the shore. Old Mike could also be seen wending his way towards his cabin at something more than his accustomed pace.

Harold and the little girls were somewhat disappointed at thus having to stay behind ; but the pleasure of gathering materials for the fire compensated them. A stone's throw off in the woods they found abundance of dry sticks, and soon quite a small stack stood hard by where Edith sat. As she laughingly told them, there was enough for a hundred fires ; but they thought that “ playing gipsy ” would be so nice a thing, and that if they had a fire once they might have many more.

In a space of time that seemed almost incredible, the boys, followed by Freda and Pat, could be seen almost flying round the lake on their return, and when they came near enough Arthur held a teapot and tea-canister aloft to show how successful he had been. Walter carried a basket, a canister, a cake, and some crockery ; Freda a few small parcels ; whilst Pat brought up the rear with the more ignoble material of a tea-kettle, a bottle of milk, and a huge loaf. He had

tied the kettle to his back with a cord, the bottle of milk dangled from his arm by a string fastened round the neck, and a huge newly-baked loaf, just peeping from a cloth, rested before him on the old saddle. Dismounting, Arthur and Walter soon made a fire, for they had been thoughtful enough to bring paper and matches ; and Pat, scampering off into the wood, filled the kettle from a cool clear spring. Whilst it boiled the girls set out the tea-things, as also sugar and milk, and Edith, laying aside her work, cut the bread and butter. The water boiled, the tea was made, and all gathered round as merrily as could be—for the meal looked most tempting, though only spread upon the grass. For Forbes had been generous : though dishes and plates were but few, she had sent delicious ham cut in slices, potted meat, plum-cake, and cakes, biscuits and tarts of several kinds. All three children told Edith how cheerfully the housekeeper had entered into the spirit of the gipsy meal, and how she said she could spare the tea-kettle and cups and saucers, and that they could be hidden away in the bushes and so be at hand whenever needed.

Thus merry with their gipsy meal, the children all at once missed Pat. But the cause of his absence was not long a mystery : he had run off some little way to a brook where watercresses were abundant, and now returned with a large bunch well washed and ready for eating. Some clean sticks placed crossways had, however, to form the plate, for none other was to be had. But this very rusticity added immensely to the children's delight. Little Pat, who was as much a child as they, was made to sit down hard by, and to his infinite joy he was not only treated with "swate tay" but with ham and plum-cake. The last, as he confessed, was a "grate thrate," though he often got a slice when he carried fish to the castle kitchen.

A step approached, and a figure momentarily shadowed

the lessening sunlight. Looking up, old Mike stood there with outstretched hands, in one of which was a great newly-boiled crab dished on a cabbage leaf, and in the other a cup full of richly frothed cream. Kneeling, he humbly set these dainties on the gipsy table.

"The crab, me lady, is jist hot from the kittle, and the crame-be from our beautiful cow—and a pictur she is ! Ye'll taste 'em both, me lady?—it'll rejoice the hearts of us."

"Thank you much, Mike ; I accept your offerings with the greatest pleasure, though you see we've already had a feast."

"I know, me lady, ye want for nothing ; nobody does that have the Ladies Clare, the good Dochter, and Misthress Haller near at hand. But ye'll taste the crame, me lady?—for Daisy—that's the cow—is a beautiful crathur."

"At once, Mike ; but the crab ! that we'll take home for supper. I never saw a finer."

"I'm glad to plase ye, Misthress Hexham, for ye're good to little Pathrick, and that touches our hearts. But the crab was in the say this morning, and now not tin minnits from the kittle."

"I hear you are a skilful fisherman, Mike ; and I intend some day, when I have time, to paint your cabin and its surroundings when the great kettle is over the fire. But won't you have a cup of tea ? The kettle boils, and I can easily make some fresh."

"Thank ye, me lady. Though it ain't like a drop o' th' crathur—I'm meaning whisky—tay's a good thing. I'll take a cup, if not too troublesome ;" and as he said so, the old man took off his battered hat, wiped his brows with a ragged pocket-handkerchief, and withdrawing respectfully a little to the rear, sat down on the grass. Fresh tea was soon made, and a large cupful was handed to him, as also some cake. Edith then proceeded to divide the kindly present of cream between herself and the children ; and doing so, the cup which

held it attracted her attention. It was an open vessel, shaped somewhat as a porringer ; the handle was prettily formed and well put on ; and over the body, which was of good red earth, were scattered coloured reliefs in imitation of ferns and other plants peculiar to this mountainous sea-washed coast of western Ireland. The art displayed, if rude, was so tasteful that she questioned Mike thereon. He could tell her nothing ; and an appeal to little Pat elicited no more than that his grandmother gave shelter one stormy night to a poor wandering potter and his heavily-laden asses, and in the morning, when he went his way, he bestowed this cup upon her in return for her kindness.

"How long is this ago, Pat ?"

"About a year. It was a dreadful night, and me grand-fa'der was out fishing."

"It war indeed an awful night, me lady ; and I niver thought to see me ould Biddy agin ; but the God in 'iven guarded me, and the big waves druv' the boat into a little bay, and I was saved. Och ! it was a fearful night."

"I hope we shall never encounter a dreadful storm, Mike. And whilst I think of it, if you should ever meet with this wandering potter, send him to me to the Grange."

"I will, me lady ; I'll make me inquiries afther him."

Tea was over, saving with old Mike at the rear ; and Edith was about to rise and adjourn to the knoll hard by, where her painting materials lay, when she saw that the elder children wished to speak to her. Indeed, for some minutes they had been endeavouring to attract her attention without effect. Now that she looked at them inquiringly, they nudged one another, whispered and laughed.

"Well, what is it ?" she asked ; "you must make haste. I've already lost too much time, as well as some of the finest lights of early evening. A gipsy tea must not take place every day."

Again the boys nudged one another ; and Freda spoke.

"Mamma, Arthur and Walter have something *very* particular to ask you ; not that you can grant it, but you can speak to Dr. Marlow. Indeed, it is a matter we have all very much at heart."

"Well, what is it? Or rather, tell me at supper, for the fading tints are precious."

"It is just this, Edith," said Arthur, mustering up courage. "We all like the isle, and we want to build a house on it and be Robinson Crusoes as much as we can,—I mean, in play. We won't neglect our lessons ; and you recollect that Dr. Grim—Marlow, I mean, said we should have any reasonable indulgence, if we were industrious."

"Arthur," replied Edith, seriously, "I do not like asking Dr. Marlow favours. Do your lessons well, and then in the course of time you can ask the favour for yourselves."

"No, that won't do," replied Walter and Arthur in a breath ; "do ask for us !"

Edith had risen ; and now, without answering them, she turned to old Mike and said : "These children are asking me to let them build a house on the isle. Such a thing wouldn't be possible, would it?"

"I cannot be saying, me lady. It's sid there was a tower or a chapel, or something of that sort, on it once upon a time. But I don't know : th' Dochter must be asked, or the Misthress Haller, and they'll spake to the grate ladies."

"Do mamma, do," entreated Freda and Iole ; but Edith, hastening to her work, made no reply.

The boys then gathered round old Mike, and after talking some time to him in a low voice, went to where Edith sat, and begged they might go again to the isle, if only for half an hour. After some entreaty, and on their promising every precaution, she consented ; but the condition was that the girls should not accompany them.

"We shan't be troubled with them," replied Arthur, with something like contempt; "for they're all off with Pat to wash the tea-things at the spring in the woods, and after that there's to find a cupboard in the bushes. They intend you to have a gipsy tea every day."

"If I have, I must not be troubled with company very often. Now, go and be careful. As soon as the sun sets I shall be on the shore opposite the isle, and shall expect to find you waiting and ready to accompany me home."

And so they went, full of boyish glee—old Mike following a little more steadily, though sharing their good spirits, and as willing to please them as if they were relations to the generous ladies he served.

Edith painted on, catching here a tint, forming there an outline; now and then throwing in some near or distant shadow that beautified the whole. Presently, as she glanced at the beautiful and picturesque little promontory which stretched into the shallows of the lake, and from which the cattle were slowly retreating to the higher ground, she saw Dr. Marlow. He was standing at the extreme end, and stroking, as customary, his heavy beard, looking towards where she sat on the opposite shore. As soon as she raised her head he moved away, and hastening to where the lakes narrowed to each other, crossed the sparkling pebbly ford which lay between, and slanting away from the windings of the shore, had in some quarter of an hour reached the wood-backed hillock on which she sat. Taking off his hat and wishing her "good-evening," he sat down no great way off.

"I am come," he said, "to apologise for my apparent rudeness this morning. It was neither meant, nor was it real. If I had said what I thought, why——"

"No apology is necessary, Dr. Marlow," she interrupted; "I want no praise, and as much corrective criticism as you

please. When my work is done it will be time to praise, if of praise it be worthy. Now let me drop the subject. The children were delighted with their schoolmaster, and I am sure in their desire to please you you will find their best incentive to diligence. But they have a favour to ask you, and wish me to give it expression."

"What is it? They attended admirably to their lessons, and I will please them if I can."

"It seems that the isle has brought to their memories the history of Robinson Crusoe, and from this the idea has grown of playing that character themselves. To build a house, to furnish it, to grow corn, and keep a goat, and do such other things as belong to primitive and simple life."

"A really good idea. Children through their play learn often much which is useful in after life."

"But I repressed the idea till you could be consulted. The boys might do some harm, there might be danger, and it might not be expedient for us to trespass further on the goodness of the Ladies Clare. But I am quite sure, were Arthur permitted to give vent to his constructive faculty, he would show an excellence far beyond the reach of ordinary boys. His father's family possessed great skill in this respect.

"Your husband's family?" he hazarded, and stroking his beard.

"No."

"How did the relationship stand? Is Arthur your own nephew?"

"No; his mother was Mr. Hexham's brother's daughter. She married a surgeon named Betton, and she and her husband are both dead."

"Tell me a little about your husband, Mrs. Hexham. Dr. Granville was silent on this point. He was a tanner by trade, was he not? very rich, very eccentric, and much older than yourself—a sort of 'Auld Robin Gray'?"

"It is a painful subject, Dr. Marlow, on which to speak, and one at all times I avoid. Few of us but what have necessity for silence on some one topic or another, as you know. Mine is a matter of feeling rather than necessity ; but I prefer to keep silence nevertheless."

He looked at her curiously as she said this ; but in a moment questioned her again.

"Excuse me. Let me ask, have you a father living ?"

"No, I loved him, made a sacrifice for him, and all in vain."

"Indeed ! And he is dead ?"

"Yes."

"And your mother ?"

"She is living, in a remote county."

"And you have brothers ?"

"Yes, but the less which is said respecting them the better. Now you will oblige me by asking no further questions. In place of them, and necessary answers, let me show you this distance. Does it reach far enough into the remote windings of the hills ? You complained in the morning, recollect."

"You would not think it complaint if you knew the truth. Let that pass. The point of view you have chosen is excellent : not one of these exquisite reaches of the lake can be seen from the castle windows, from the terrace front, or the oriels looking north and north-east. That is the great essential. For the rest, as I may neither question nor criticise truly, I will take my leave ; only saying this much—that it will be a fine picture. Good-evening. I see Mike's boat ; he shall ferry me across to the isle, and I will speak to the boys."

Dr. Marlow rose as he spoke, and walked rapidly to the shore.

"I cannot think why he perpetually asks indirect questions,"

thought Edith ; "for my private history cannot concern him in the least. But I love my art, and if I am here to paint pictures for some hidden and mysterious personage rather than teach children, I will do my duty so far as I can."

When the Doctor reached the shore he hailed old Mike, and being ferried across, he went round the isle, viewing it from every point ; but, as could be seen, with especial reference to the wide oriel in the northern tower. Then he approached the boys, and addressing Arthur, said abruptly, "So you want to build a house?"

"If you please, Dr. Marlow. The isle is very lonely, and we might play Robinson Crusoe on it, and do no harm. We would not neglect our lessons, or be idle,—indeed we wouldn't."

"Well, I'll see. If built at all, it must be here, or somewhere about here." And Dr. Marlow turned his glance again towards the distant oriel.

"Is not that point nearer the shore better?" asked Walter. "Mike says there have been buildings of some kind there. The gentlemen who visited the isle last autumn said so."

"That cannot be considered by me. With what would you build the house? With wood?"

"No, plase your honour," spoke Mike ; "wid stone There's enough of it on the near sayshore to build the grate Babel itself. Shure, if the little gintlemin built with wood, it would niver stand a grate storm. And if it was a purty house, it would be a pity to see it washed away like a cockleshell."

"But the stone would be difficult to carry, and shape fit for building."

"There's the ponies, Docther—the strong patient crathurs. And the stone's not hard to shape, for——"

"We need them smooth on only three sides," interrupted

Arthur ; "if left rough for the outer side it would be more picturesque. In a book which belonged to Uncle Hexham's library it was stated that all buildings of a rustic character should not affect too much art and artificial smoothness."

"You are right," said Dr. Marlow, quickly. "By the way, Arthur, do you like reading books on architecture? If so, I can lend you many. And now about mortar and foundations?"

"If the grate ladies should give lave," said Mike reverently, "it would be best to dig dape and sthrong and good foundations, for the lake is on the edge of the say. And as for the morther, why, in me own counthry and the likes of it, we pound th' sayshills and put sand and wather to it, and make it hot in a grate kittle and so use it. It a wonderful morther, and sticks like barnacles to a ship's bottom. As for th' shills, there's hapes and hapes on th' shore, and lime for th' fitching in a kiln a bit beyond me little cabin."

"I see, Mike," said Dr. Marlow, with the kindest smile, "you are as much a lad as the lads themselves. Denis will help, I know, and Pat will gladly, I suppose. Well, I will ask leave. The Ladies Clare are proud of this most beautiful island in their beautiful lakes ; and I cannot give permission without their sanction. I will speak to them, and the boys shall hear the result before long. Meanwhile each of you can draw some plans—you, Arthur, especially ; and then I shall see how far the constructive skill goes, of which Mrs. Hexham speaks so highly."

He said no more, but wishing them all good-evening, bade Mike row him to the shore. Whilst crossing, his keen glance rested on the black and as it seemed imperishable piles, and a suggestion arose.

"Mike," he said, "supposing the Ladies Clare give the boys leave to build a house, would not the piles support a few planks and so form a bridge? If some stout poles

were sunk in in those places where the piles have rotted or been swept away, they would altogether support a bridge which would be safe enough, I fancy: indeed, more so than a boat, which had to pass to and fro with heavy loads."

"It would, yer honour. Planks have been laid across more than once, and a few more piles would make it sthrong enough to carry the wickedness of th' ould one himself—the saints forgive me! The little gintlemin could take no harm—and th' Misthress Hexham and th' Misthress Haller wouldn't be throubled in their minds."

"Well, that would be a great point—to say nothing of the Ladies Clare. Now, good evening, Mike." Thus speaking, and slipping a gratuity into the old fisherman's hand, Dr. Marlow sprang from the boat as it touched the bank, and bent his rapid steps round that head of the lake which lay west to the shore.

Full of hope that their request would be granted, the boys, when they had crossed over from the isle, and sat down on the turf to await Mrs. Hexham's arrival, questioned old Mike as to the pieces of rock on the shore, the lime, the mortar, and the wood wherewith to build. So overwhelming and eager were their questions, that the old man could not answer them quick enough.

"As to wood, childer," he replied, "there's enough near at hand. Plinty of felled trees; and Ambrose and Daniel—two of me Ladies' tinants as live a bit from here, and do th' sort o' work whiniver nadeful—would soon saw planks or trim poles and posts enough. But it wouldn't be naded, I'm thinking. There's wreck and driftwood enough on the shore to build a hundred houses. Beautifol floors and doors, and sich things, as have formed parts of grate ships that have gone down in the dape."

"How dreadful!" replied Arthur; "if we used them we

should be so often reminded of the horrors of shipwreck and the sea."

"Nay, me little masther, that fa'lin' would wear away. Betther the beautiful things should be used, than whaste to nothing on the lonely shore."

Thus they talked ; and they had just arranged to visit the shore with Mike and Denis on the following afternoon, when Mrs. Hexham and the girls appeared in sight. Pat and the two elder boys saddled the ponies, and, all mounting, they were soon on their rapid way to the Grange—old Mike returning to his cabin, whilst night rapidly veiled the wild rocks and the wilder waves, which beat in ceaseless fury over and around them.

All were very weary when they reached home ; but they supped off the great crab, and after so fine a feast went gladly to bed. But Arthur could not rest. Robinson Crusoe and his isle, the nearer island on the beautiful lake, the house to be built, the garden to be dug and planted,—all mingled in his dreams. He rose early, as also did Walter ; and by breakfast time each had sketched out a dozen houses. But Edith gravely told them that work must come before play. She would not even examine their drawings till a more appropriate hour. After breakfast they all went to the schoolroom, and there prepared their lessons for Miss Haller in the evening, and Dr. Marlow on the morrow. The boys were then permitted to depart with Denis, on condition that they kept well in the care of Mike, and did not venture too near the more dangerous parts of the rocky shore. To this was added the strict injunction that they must be home by six o'clock, if not before. The little girls had to practise their music each an hour, and thus they took their turn at the piano in the drawing-room ; whilst, with open doors between, Edith sat at her easel, and worked in the minor lights and shadows of the evening scene.

On leaving the Grange, the three boys mounted their ponies, whilst Denis followed more slowly on old Jack, the horse. Arthur's pony was named Shamrock, Walter's Blunder, Harold's Starlight ; but though thus differently named, they were quite akin in breed, and sped along the rocky, wild, and broken ground with a spirit and surety of foot most charming to see. Rounding the second headland, they came upon the wild and rock-strewn shore ; not so wild at first as where it stretched away in the far distance. Mike waited for them, and then kept afoot at a pace wonderful for a man past sixty. At first the rocks, though piled one upon another, and washed by crested waves, did little more than stretch beyond the beach ; but they soon rose in greater masses, and extended further inland. Beyond the little creek and its pool, at the rear of which, and just in the shadow of the woods, the old fisherman's solitary cabin lay, this wilder and sterner coast at once began, and rapidly increased in savage grandeur, till, as Mike said, about two miles away the mighty rocks stretched inland as well as out to sea, for the breadth of at least a mile. Amidst these dreadful pinnacles, rugged cliffs, and mighty basalt columns, the swell of the Atlantic Ocean broke in ceaseless and appalling fury—no change in its awful and mysterious grandeur, force and power ever taking place, except when intensified by winter storms. Then, as Mike said, the spray and foam of the breakers were carried far inland. At those times no human being, not even practised fishermen and coastguardsmen, could approach these rocky solitudes without danger of being washed away ; and even ordinarily there were parts it was not wise to approach. Frightful narrow cliffs, great columnar masses, washed by glassy-looking water of unfathomable depth, and rugged, jagged, piled-up rocks, over and through which crested waves burst unceasingly in fitful deluge.

Whilst yet on that part of the shore which lay between the headland and the little creek, old Mike showed the boys the abundance of stones with which they could build their house. Some were of trap, others of igneous rocks ; but the larger part were fragments of porphyry and other beautiful marbles. Washed daily by the sea, they were for the most part covered with weeds, sand, and small shells ; but these could be easily removed, and numbers of the stones being portable, well-shaped, and beautifully smoothed by the action of the waves through countless ages, they were likely, with some measure of constructive skill, to serve their intended purpose well.

"Ye see, Masther Arthur," said Mike, "the fairies and giants same to have jist put 'im here on purpose for ye. It's but a bit of a way to the lake. Ye'll jist wind up through the sand, the stones and gorse, thin over the brow 'twixt the say and the lake, a bit further on, and ye're there. Wid a good pair each of me fishing baskets, Shamrock, Starlight, and Blunder will make no more of a score of 'im than if they carried nothing, the purty crathurs !"

"Then can't we begin carrying the stones to-morrow afternoon, Mike ?" asked Arthur and Walter in a breath.

"Ye must ask Masther Denis. He lives more in the sight of the masther and misthresses than I do."

Denis shook his head. Till Dr. Marlow had asked and gained leave nothing could be done. They must be patient a few days. Dr. Marlow was sure not to forget his promise.

They were unwilling, however, to proceed along the coast till they had dismounted, and selected, under Mike's guidance, some dozens of beautiful stones, from about the size of an ordinary brick to those from three to six feet in length and breadth. These they carried and piled one upon another upon the green verge of the sands, resolving to visit the spot again on their next holiday, and free them from shells and weeds. As, in selecting some of the best, they had to pass

within the line of the waves, several came toppling over them, and many washed over their boots, though they ran as fast as they could to avoid them. But these mischances only made great fun. Mike gave it as his opinion that boys were good for nothing who minded "a little say-wather, for it was good for the likes of 'im, the young frisking crathurs !" So they laughed, shook their jackets, squeezed their hair, wiped their faces and ears with their pocket-handkerchiefs, and ran onwards as soon as a good pile of stones was gathered, as though the sea had not soaked their boots and stockings.

Leaving their ponies fastened to a stake, and passing over, by the aid of stepping-stones, the salt-water creek where it was shallowest, they ascended a rugged ravine to the wilder and more solitary shore ; this wildness and solitude increasing at every step. Here they had to bear away more inland, for the rocks neither allowed passage nor the force of the boiling surge an approach. Inland the land rose, thus allowing in some parts of a distinct view of the wild and awful grandeur of the scene.

The boys were astonished ; they had read many books of travel, and seen many pictures of wild and savage scenery, but no landscape described, seen, or imagined equalled this. They questioned Mike. He replied that he was getting an old man, and was a comparative stranger to the coast, and though he had been far along it either way since he came to Morr, and ventured shorewards to its more noted parts—as those named "Devil's Net," "Witches' Cauldron," and "Timber Cove"—he didn't know things like a native. "Shure in his own beautiful counthry, the county Wicklow, he'd know iv'rything. But Masther Denis would know 'im, —a beautiful counthry, too, wid grate ladies in it, wid true Irish hearts, as iv'rybody knew."

Thus appealed to, and delighted to be so, old Denis told the lads wonderful stories—a little wandering, to be sure, for

his mind, as we have said, at times wavered—of his own boyish days. His father had been a coastguardsman; and, as a lad, he had visited every possible spot of the wild and rocky shore. Unknown to his father, he had joined wreckers in their cruel trade; he had, with other boys, climbed as well as descended the most inaccessible cliffs in search of sea-birds' eggs; and he had braved every danger in order to tread spots perhaps never trodden by human foot before. The boys were enthralled by these narrations; they resolved that old Denis should tell his stories over and over again, for they could never grow tired.

Weary, however, of traversing the rough country which lay at the rear of this terrible shore, they sat down for a few minutes' rest on a turfy ledge; and whilst so sitting, old Mike and Denis together pointed out to them the foam-covered, breaker-washed rocks, known as the "Devil's Net." It was thus called because amid the awful din of waters was a pool, so protected by rocky masses as to be comparatively tranquil; and into this, through several channels, when great storms raged high, and certain currents and winds prevailed, objects of all kinds were borne in and there remained; for on this most cruel and rockbound coast wrecks were frequent, in winter time especially. Gallant and richly-laden ships were either dashed upon the rocks and there broken to pieces, or else, borne by the fury of the waves on to awful ledges and pointed jagged cliffs, they foundered and went down in deep water. Then followed the sad and customary harvests of such scenes, for most of what was swept into the "Devil's Net" was retained. Denis further said that about three miles inland were several assemblages of mud cabins, misnamed villages, inhabited by lawless savages, who derived their chief means of subsistence from wrecks. They grew potatoes and a few oats, kept pigs and a cow or two on the wastes around; but whatever might be

their occupation at the time—if any they had, for the majority of their days were spent in sheer idleness—when certain winds prevailed, or certain prognostics of bad weather arose, they flocked to the shore, and should any unfortunate ship strike upon the rocks, they braved the most fearful dangers to reach it, never leaving till they had ransacked every part, and broken up and borne away every available and portable thing. Desperate fights, even to bloodshed, generally occurred over the division of the spoil—the weak and aged, as a matter of course, getting the worst of it and the least share of goods. Even when every vestige of a wreck had disappeared, these lawless wretches would still for days linger about the “Devil’s Net” and other similar places, to see what the chances of the sea might give of spoil; and these chances were often more productive than the wreck itself. Denis added, that a few years previously the scenes and occurrences along this cruel coast were often of a most criminal and violent character; but the severe punishment at various times of a few of these abandoned wretches, the great decrease of their number through the famine, which swept over the western coast of Ireland with peculiar violence, and the increase and efficiency of the coastguard, had lessened the amount and character of this class of crime in a great degree. Still there remained many followers of this iniquitous trade. But they were avoided by the more decent class of peasantry when met on the mountains, or when they fitfully appeared, as they often did, skulking amidst the shoreward rocks.

Excited by what Denis thus told them, the boys were impatient to proceed; and nothing would suffice but that they must see the “Devil’s Net.” Old Mike, therefore, led the way towards the rocks on the shore, over which, as might be seen, the waves broke with appalling fury, and where, for quite half a mile in an extending line, an

atmosphere of foam and mist canopied their tops. But when approach to the more shoreward of these rocks could be made, places of passage were seen here and there,—places dangerous enough to those unaccustomed to them, but still passable under a fair sky and a summer's day, though a continuous drenching from mist and spray was unavoidable.

After wading some way through the shallow surf, Mike took a rope from his pocket and tied it round the boys' waists ; he then made a noose in each end, one of which he held himself, whilst he gave the other to Denis. The boys thus secure, he clambered over rocks, waded knee-deep through surf and foam, paused for whole moments in making passage through jagged clefts, whilst the breakers leapt over their summits with deafening and darkening fury, holding suspended, as it were, a roof of water, which nothing but the force propelling it kept from descending in an overwhelming flood. After making progress in this dangerous way for full a quarter of an hour, they emerged on some comparatively level and sand-strewn rocks, at the foot of which was a surf-covered pool, longer than it was wide, and covering some acres. Several winding passages, of differing breadth, led inward from the ocean, giving ingress in all weathers to the waifs and strays of wrecks, but more especially in winter and when great storms prevailed. Then the waves being forced through them with the utmost violence, and at that height where the openings were widest, portions of great ships, bales of merchandise, and other bulky commodities were borne in and remained there, for the diurnal tides swept out and in at a lower level.

On this calm summer-like afternoon the surf-covered pool was comparatively still and free from wreck, except for a few spars and pieces of cordage. But as they passed along the narrow shore or ledge which in part surrounded it—for the pool in calm weather was not very deep, and where

free from foam its rocky bottom could be seen—they came upon other signs of the infinite variety of things cast here by the sea : some gathered in scattered heaps, others retained in the clefts, or lying on the ledges of the rocks, or else half-buried in sand, or hidden by frothy refuse. Just as one of the boys had stopped to pick out the affecting memento, in its little red shoe half-buried in the sand, of some infant who had gone down in the great sea, a wild-looking urchin, of about ten years old, emerged suddenly from behind a rock and stood before them. He was naked, but for a pair of tattered breeches much too large for him, and the water slowly dripped from his long unkempt, rusty-looking shock of hair. Startled by this sudden presence of strangers, and probably mistaking old Mike and Denis for coastguardsmen, he dropped what he held in his hands, gave a loud unearthly screech, and plunging at a bound into the pool, partly dived and partly swam in the direction of some intricate rocks which had a passage shorewards. Both Denis and Mike shouted after him, but he only swam the faster, and soon was lost to sight.

"A limb of Sathan it is," said Mike,—*"the saints forgive me ! I'm niver on the shore after me bis'nis, but I sees th' spalpeen lurking like a thief."*

"It's one o' Biddy O'Grady's childer," chimed in Denis. *"The fa'der, ill luck to 'im, was sint away for life from the counthry for half murth'ring and robbing a poor lady swept into the Nit from a wreck ; and his fa'der got hanged. It's a bad lot of 'im. The praisht, nor edication, can do nought for their souls nor their bodies, th' wickedness is so dape in their naturs."*

"Perhaps," remarked Arthur, *"the education was not of the right sort. And how, if such boys see nothing but wickedness around them, should they learn anything else?"*

"I don't know, Masther Arthur," replied Mike ; *"the whole*

gination on 'im likes wrecking and th' say : nought else they'll learn or take to, bad luck be wid 'im."

Denis had stooped down, and was now examining the things the urchin in his fright had dropped. The boys gathered round, and a sea-drenched woollen rag being untied, there was seen within a large and beautiful plate of thin pellucid oriental china, finely painted, some parts of what seemed to have been an ivory box, as also a muff of costly fur, though soddened and spoiled ; whilst scattered on the sands hard by were various fragments of clothing, the bow of a violin, and a broken flute.

"The say gives up much which it takes," said Mike, with a sigh ; "sometimes slow, sometimes fast, sometimes not at all,—for it is a grate devourer and spares nothing."

After some debate, it was agreed to carry home the beautiful plate to Edith ; and when the boys had searched for some further time amidst the sandy hillocks, the clefts of the rocks, and the foam-covered surf as it washed in-shore, they prepared to go. Denis guided them safely through some intricate rocky windings to a point where the breakers ceased to touch the land ; and very glad they were, for the noise had been deafening, and the spray therefrom continually wetting them, had kept them chill.

So much of the afternoon was now gone as to leave time to see nothing further than a sort of bay, about half a mile onwards, known as "Timber Cove," from the immense quantity of timber cast up from time to time upon its inland shore. With a wider and clearer opening to the sea than the "Devil's Net," it was in certain winds swept by several currents from the open ocean, and these bringing in vast portions of dismantled ships, the coast for some way inland was like a vast timber yard, the spoils of centuries lying heaped one upon another ; those lying farthest away being blanched and sere through long exposure. Though the peasantry

and farmers for miles around made unlimited use of these spoils of the ocean for house-building, fencing, and many domestic purposes, it had apparently made little impression upon the vast accumulation; each winter's melancholy storms and tempests more than replacing what might have been abstracted during the foregone summer. The boys were astonished, for they had fancied nothing like it. Great spars, masts and hulks lay heaped together, here and there piled like a cathedral tower; whilst in the interstices, covered with drift and sand, lay wedged lighter portions of wood-work—as doors of lockers and cabins, pieces of flooring and roofing, and remnants of furniture,—all these things nearest the sea being of far more modern date than those shoreward.

"You see, little gintlemin," said Mike, "you won't want for thimber for yer house whin once ye begin building. We shall find planking, too, and railing for a bridge across the piles; so that ye may work safe, and the Misthress Hexham and the Dochter have no throuble about your doings at all."

"But we can never fetch it along such a coast," exclaimed Walter; "we've already spent so much time coming from the creek by your cabin."

"Have the grate Ladies' lave, and we'll soon find a way," replied the old man cheerily. "Me and Masther Denis know a purty road slanting from me cabin. It is an a'sy road, and a short road, and the ponies'll make nothing of it. What's more, whin I know ye may begin, I'll come afore, and pick out what's proper for ye. Your work 'll come a'sy, for jist look up there, jist above yer heads—see th' beautiful doors and window-frames, all ra'lly gilt and riddy for yer use."

After wandering some further while round and about these vast timber-piles, it was time to return to Morr; but neither Mike nor Denis could persuade the boys to do so till they

had had a glimpse, if no more, of the awful coast which lay beyond, and which began at no great distance. And soon they saw enough and heard enough. After struggling for some few hundred yards round the ledges of slimy rocks, which had scarce footing for a goat, they beheld, where these opened a little, the ocean surging in tremendous breakers over a whole country, as it seemed, of rocky masses, piled one upon the other higher and higher, till, at the distance of at least two miles, they rose into awful cliffs, at the foot of which the raging waters broke in vain. When these ended, a softer and pastoral country began. This could only be reached by diverging far inland, for few or none ever attempted to penetrate into those awful solitudes of foam, mist, and avalanches of glassy waters. Occasionally the wreckers, tied together by ropes, ventured into the more inland portions of these deadly fastnesses; but the risk they encountered was greater than any possible gain.

By sloping inland they met with a short and easy road; and crossing the head of the creek by Mike's cabin—where they left the worthy, honest old man—they reached the spot where they had tethered the ponies and old Jack. Here the boys and old Denis, mounting, reached the Grange not far behind the appointed hour.

Whilst tea was in progress the boys recounted their wonderful adventures with a varied skill which greatly pleased Edith; and she resolved, if possible, to paint one or more of these wild and solitary sea scenes. The little girls were likewise immensely interested, and wishing they had been with the boys, hoped on some occasion they might be permitted to accompany them. Edith with more sadness than pleasure accepted the beautiful plate; and when the housemaid had washed it, she placed it in the drawing-room, as a memorial of the unknown dead, and of the dangers of the sea.

The boys changed their clothes, the books were got ready, and the piano opened ; but the customary hour passed, and Miss Haller did not come. As the evening advanced, a note came from her to say that various anxious duties, and great fatigue combined, rendered a visit to the Grange that night impossible ; and she was not to be expected for some days, or till she made a fresh appointment. Edith therefore permitted the children to spend the rest of the evening together in the play-room, which, as already said, lay between the dining-room and the wide passage into the kitchen. Here, whilst they behaved properly, and did not make too much noise, they were suffered to do as they pleased. It was a land of liberty, on which no one intruded ; and this liberty they all intensely enjoyed. Pat brought in the boys soiled and soddened clothes, and emptied the well-filled pockets ; then pocket-handkerchiefs and pieces of rag picked up on the shore, and used for bundles, were untied, and the contents heaped on the table. Pat, who enjoyed all this as much as "th' little gintlemin" and "th' swate little ladies," fetched a crock of water, and helped to wash and free all these waifs and strays of the shore from slime and sand ; and the result was a strange miscellany, which Edith, Forbes, Denis, and the two maids were called in to see. There were copper coins of various countries, two silver ones of small value, a wedding ring, a brooch, a corkscrew, part of a watch, a silk handkerchief much torn, fragments of children's toys, and various other trifles. The coins were divided between Denis and Pat ; the rest of the things, by Edith's advice, were carefully stored away in a pretty cabinet beside one of the windows. This cabinet had glass doors ; and here, as she said, they could preserve anything of interest they found on the shore. And if Freda would number and ticket the things, and catalogue them in a book, a sort of museum would in time be formed, and

for which they would probably find a name. This idea delighted them all.

The morrow was their day at school ; and Edith repaired alone to the lake to paint. Dr. Marlow came late and left early, and was so stern, grave, and sententious in his manner, that even Arthur, who cared the least for his abrupt austerity, and habitually called him " Dr. Grimwig," was afraid to ask if leave had yet been granted by the Ladies Clare to build a house upon the isle.

In this way three weeks went by—Miss Haller omitting all visits to the Grange, and Dr. Marlow's attendance at the tower being irregular and brief. Edith asked no questions, and made no comments to the children ; but to her it was very plain that some cause for great solicitude existed at the castle, and that its nature was not unknown to Forbes and Denis.

At last the boys were so impatient to begin the house that they appealed to Denis. " Could not they do something towards it ? Surely there could be no harm in preparing the stones, in carrying them to the shore of the lake, and in selecting and fetching the wood ? " To this he replied in a cautious manner ; but that he or Forbes used some influence in the matter was not improbable, for next day he said, as though incidentally, " he thought they might begin to move the stones : a little hape on the lake-shore could do no harm any way."

So, to their infinite joy, they began their operations that very afternoon. Both Denis and Mike could show them how to use a mallet and chisel after the manner of masons ; and Denis accompanying them to the shore, they faced and trimmed one side of the stones already selected. Whilst this was being done, Mike fetched three pairs of his old fishing skeps, and tying them pannier-wise on the three ponies which had brought the boys, these were soon filled, and the

fine little fellows, each with its master at its head, went as firmly and spiritedly up from the rock-strewn shore to the heath-clad ridge above, and thence to the lake, as though they carried feathers instead of stones. And this activity and pleasure in doing the work set for them was the simple result of kind treatment and generous care; for though dumb creatures, they were God's creatures, and the Ladies Clare, greatly loving dumb animals themselves, had through all their long lives inculcated and enforced, so far as they could, the love and tender care of such among their servants and dependants.

Thus, in steady pursuit of their lessons, and these varied amusements, the children's time went by for full another fortnight. A large number of stones were shaped and carried to the lake, several pony-loads of timber had been transported to the same place; and now the boys were busy fetching lime and sand, for mortar. Through many silent and serene days Edith had wrought steadily at her picture. The peace of nature, except for the lowing of kine, the songs of birds, the musical monotonous dash of the waves upon the shore, the trickling of spring and rivulet in the woods hard by, the glory of the summer sun, the gentleness of the summer wind, were alike inspiring and inspiriting to such a worshipper of art. Already upon her canvas lay the vernal glory of the spring, sobered by the descending shades of evening. The mist rose upon the hills, the lakes wound round their feet, waning away from sight where their ravishing beauty was greatest. She had never painted so well before. Inspired by better health, a happier life, and more generous environments, she worked like one freshly endowed with higher gifts, and was conscious that her picture would be worthy of the scene.

As thus the beautiful picture approached completion, Edith, after a long day's work, mounted Jove, and rode

down to the edge of the lake opposite the isle, where she had that morning arranged to meet the boys, and return with them to Morr. When she reached the mound of stones and wood, she saw they were catching and saddling their ponies, some little way off. Waiting for them, and her eye traversing the opposite shore of the lake, she saw that the large tower, from which most parts of the isle interiorly must be distinctly seen, and which hitherto had all its windows closely blinded, was now alive with workmen. Some were on scaffolding, some at the base; but more especially were they clustered about a large window, on a level with the first floor of the grand front which stretched along the terrace. They appeared to be building a capacious balcony, and changing its mullioned casements for double doors of plate glass. Wondering at this change, and if it were in any way connected with the children's anticipated house-building on the isle, she was still regarding it—the workmen now leaving for the night—when Arthur, Walter and Harold rode up. It was not her intention to make any comments, but Arthur himself introduced the subject.

"Mamma," he said, "the Doctor was brighter to-day; his spirits were good, and his old worn look of care was nearly gone. He said nothing relative to our Robinson Crusoe house, but he said he should be at the Grange about eight this evening, for he wanted to speak to you; so perhaps we shall hear if we are to have leave or not to build. I fancy we shall; for look there, do you see the alterations which are being made in that tower?"

Edith answered in the affirmative, but endeavoured to conceal any show of curiosity.

"Dr. Grimwig has been superintending the men nearly all the afternoon, and they seem to have been placing a large mirror on one side of the window. Then one of the old Ladies Clare came to look, and then Miss Haller. The isle

seemed to be the chief point of attraction. Perhaps they are going to overlook us : do you think so ?”

“I really cannot say. We had better be riding onwards.”

“We can soon ascertain by a glass. Edith, do you know what has become of the telescope ? I have hunted in every possible place, and cannot find it. The last time I recollect seeing it was on our first visit to the isle.”

“Yes,” replied Edith, gravely ; “and speaking to one boy, I speak to all. I have put it away—in fact, locked it up—for so long as we remain at Morr. There is some mystery about the place—some one residing within the castle walls more than we know of. But it is not for us to penetrate the secret, which, we may be sure, is one connected with a sorrow and not a wrong ; and the Ladies Clare being to us such generous friends, it is for us to respect and not pry into that which they are so desirous of concealing. To be secretly watching their acts, and those of their friends and servants, would not only be treacherous, but in bad taste ; and for these various reasons I have put the telescope away. I wish for it to be neither referred to nor asked for more.”

The boys made no reply ; but Walter and Arthur, though on the whole very honourable and gentlemanly boys, were immensely curious, and Edith's words rather stimulated than lessened their burning desire to find the secret out ; if secret there were.

No more was said ; and they rode pleasantly homewards, the little girls running out to meet and welcome them as soon as they came in sight of the Grange. After tea, Edith took her picture from the portfolio, and set it on the easel, and then repaired to the drawing-room to write some letters, and hear Lucy play her music lesson ; for on her return from the lake she had found an unusually pleasant and cheerful note from Miss Haller, in which that lady intimated that she

should resume her customary lessons on the next evening but one.

The studio, as already said, lay near the drawing-room, and looked west to the shore and north to the beautiful wooded lawn and avenue. Whilst thus seated writing, she heard distinctly some one pass from the lawn towards the shore into the studio by one of its low open windows ; and there, crossing the room, stay abruptly before what was probably the easel. She knew, from the firm, distinct, nervous footsteps, that the one who had thus entered was Dr. Marlow ; but she continued writing, while the little girl, delighted with the task before her, played on with exquisite touch and rapturous ear.

After an interval of quite a quarter of an hour, the visitor opened the door and came in. It was, as she had imagined, Dr. Marlow. But his look was bright and eager, his cheerfulness unusual ; and stroking his heavy beard in characteristic fashion, he advanced and shook her by the hand. Then, bidding Lucy cease playing, he sat down.

"It is three weeks and more since I was here," he said.

Mrs. Hexham replied it was ; but that she had heard of him through the children.

"And in addition," he replied, "that I had given them short time and fewer words ?"

"I never question them, Dr. Marlow. You told me in first coming that reticence and unobservance would be virtues here. I have obeyed to the letter, and I impress the need of the same on the children—the boys especially. But you know that one of the sins of childhood, or perhaps I should say virtues, is curiosity—often insatiable curiosity ; and in the case of Walter and Arthur I fear this tendency runs wild. They rarely, boys or girls, make remarks on your proceedings. If they do I suppress them at once. It is very good of you, Dr. Marlow, to aid me so efficiently in the heavier

and more responsible part of my work, and I have no right to complain, were your teaching less able or your attendance less punctual than it is."

"Thank you. Having been for the last few days temporarily relieved from heavy anxiety and great responsibility, I have come to ask your assistance in a matter which ought to have been attended to some time ago. You remember the old woman who came here to seek advice for a sick child?"

"I do; and have often desired to learn the result."

"Well, the child is better,—would soon be perfectly well, could she be removed from the dark, dank and lonely cave in which she still is. When the old woman first took me to see her, she was suffering from typhus fever of a most malignant and contagious character, brought on solely by her father's folly in not keeping her in a decent home, and by causing her to be so frequently transported from place to place on nothing better than the back of a rough pony, and this through the wildest country and in the worst weather. He is, unfortunately for the child, the captain of a gang of noted smugglers, and though a gentleman by birth and education, he is one of the worst ruffians known on this coast. At present, the search by the Government being rather hot against him, and his residence in this part suspected, he has gone temporarily—probably for a few months—to the north-western coast of Spain, where some of the agents and men he employs are residing. Before his departure he gave the old woman, who has been a most devoted nurse to the child, leave to find a lodging for her in one of the nearest villages, going to and fro to see her as she best could; for she has to take care of the cave and its contents, whatever they may be. I assure you, Mrs. Hexham, fearless as I am, I have not mixed with these people without the greatest reluctance. In fact, I have even done what is

a wrong to public justice and my own conscience, in consorting for a moment with them. But the motive has been one of charity. The beauty and innocence of the child, her dangerous state, and the knowledge that only medical skill promptly afforded could save her life, induced me to listen to the appeal brought to me by Denis the night you know of. Even then I should not have gone, but for the assurance that Quinlivan—for such is the father's name—was not there; and in my subsequent visits the old woman has carefully guarded against my encountering him or any of his men. What I now ask you is to let the child come here for a time. She is of gentle birth, and would, if her father had been other than a spendthrift and a ruffian, have been sheltered in a beautiful old hall, about twenty miles from here, instead of being a neglected outcast in the cave of a desolate seashore. I have gained the old woman's consent, provided she may come to and fro at will; but the child——”

“With the children to entice her, Kathie will soon gladly come,” interrupted Mrs. Hexham. “They have already made her acquaintance, for she came with us some way in the coach that brought us to this district. Arthur and the girls gave her some books, and won her heart completely.”

“Some gaudy-covered books, eh?—‘Mother Hubbard,’ ‘Jack the Giant-killer,’ and others of the sort.”

“Yes. To eye and ear ‘Mother Hubbard’ was a world of enchantment.”

“Well, she treasures them enough. In her wildest delirium, a dog and something she called ‘Shavy’ were ever before her, and now these toy books are her chief amusement. With the acquaintance thus begun, and the old mourvreen with her heart warmed towards you for your kind manner when she came here in her deep distress, all is easy, provided you have no objection.”

“I have none; but we must speak to Forbes.”

"It is unnecessary, Mrs. Hexham ; your will is law here. Now, will you object to walk with me to the cave ? The old woman expects us and the children—at least, some of them must come too."

"Do you mean to-night ? Are the shore and tide safe ?"

Dr. Marlow smiled. "With me, who know all phases of nature on this coast, you can take no harm."

"And the cave ? There will be no smugglers about ?"

"No ; you need not fear in the least."

"Thank you. But it is not necessary, is it, that all the children should go ?"

"No ; limit them to the three eldest. Now I want to speak to them. Where are they ?"

Mrs. Hexham said, in their playroom. Old Mike had brought them a fresh consignment of what he called "spiles of the say," and they were, she believed, washing and arranging them.

"Let us go to them." And Dr. Marlow, as he spoke, passed into the hall and gently opened the playroom door. Mrs. Hexham followed, and they stood for some minutes unperceived.

This group of happy children was a picture worth looking at. Being to themselves, in what they called "Liberty Hall," they were "up to their eyes and ears in mess," as prim governesses and nurses would say ; and yet they were as happy as butterflies in the noonday sun, or as birds poised over moorland heights while carolling their free songs. Arthur stood with his arm round Lucy ; Freda and Walter were wiping and rubbing various small objects which Pat handed them from the little crock in which he washed them ; and Iole and Harold were employed in sorting out such objects from the heap of mingled sand and seaweed in which old Mike had brought them from the shore. A lamp stood on

the table, and the doors of the pretty cabinet of treasures stood wide open.

"Boys!" called Dr. Marlow loudly. And at the sound of his voice all the children started, turned round, and were instantly attentive.

"I have good news for you. The Ladies Clare will let you play Robinson Crusoe on their beautiful isle; and you may begin your play in earnest in a day or two. For the rest of the week I give you a holiday."

"Oh dear, dear! How jolly—how nice!" This was all the boys and Freda, in the intensity of their delight, could say.

"But, boys, there must be some little order and method in your building. You must draw plans, and I must see them; you must not scatter your stones and mortar at random over the beautiful isle. A plan settled, you must peg out or otherwise mark a rude outline on the sward, and I must see it before a sod is cut. Beyond this I shall not interfere—though you must keep in a measure to the limits of the north or north-east, where shrubs in some degree fringe the margin, and the banks slope to a shallow of the lake. Now there is something else to say to you: Mrs. Hexham will explain. Two or three of you are to come a little way with us along the shore."

In as few words as possible Mrs. Hexham told them about little Kathie: how she had had a long illness, and how kindly Dr. Marlow had attended her and saved her life. She was living in a large cave on the south shore—the very one Arthur had seen—and in the care of the old woman they had met on the moorland height beyond Morr, the day Walter, Harold and Lucy came. Dr. Marlow was very anxious, for the sake of her perfect restoration to health, to have her received at the Grange for a time, and to this proposition the old woman had gladly consented provided

she might go to and fro at will ; but the child, when questioned, would hear nothing of leaving the "old mourvreen."

"But, you know, children," she added, addressing Freda, Iole and Arthur, "that as we met Kathie in the stage-coach on our way here, the acquaintance is begun. And as, from what Dr. Marlow has just told me, she still possesses and highly prizes the gaudy toy-books you then gave her, perhaps if you can take another or two—if they can be found—in addition to a doll or any attractive toy, you will gain her consent to pay us a visit."

"You must say for a day," said Dr. Marlow, "and no more ; or we shall spoil all. Now get the books and doll at once, and let us be going. The moon is rising, and the tide serves for a pleasant walk along the sands."

Arthur begged that Walter should go too ; so it was at once settled that the four eldest children should be of the party, whilst Lucy and Harold stayed at home. So, Lucy returning to her practice in the drawing-room, Harold helped Pat to finish the washing and rubbing, and after that to clear away the litters,—for Mrs. Hexham was rigidly particular that, whatever might be the children's employment, whether it were work or play, no obtrusive or untidy signs should remain when either was ended.

But though they were not permitted to go, Harold and Lucy were most eager in helping Freda and Iole to pack some dolls, a toy tea-service, and a few books and gaudy prints in a basket ; and Forbes being called upon to assist, added a nice sponge cake baked that afternoon.

It was a heavenly night—one of the fairest of the prime of summer. The moonlight lay upon the sea, a silvered field of sheen stretching away for leagues ; and on the shore the same divine light decked out each breaking wave in unparal- leled glory. As customary, Dr. Marlow led the way with

rapid steps, Mrs. Hexham following with the girls, whilst the boys ran here and there around the scattered rocks.

The cave was situated more than a mile from the Grange ; and the path, from the rocky nature of the ground, being none of the best, they were some time in going. At its entrance Dr. Marlow lighted a small pocket lantern—with which, as he said, he always came provided—and then led the way in the direction Arthur had pursued in his accidental discovery of the cave—namely, first to the right and then to the left—till he came to what seemed a blank sheer wall of rock. Here, guided by some accustomed sign, he picked up a stone and struck the wall loudly. In the course of a few minutes, a strip of what had previously seemed impervious rock was opened doorwise from the inner side, and the little company saw before them the narrow passage which led up, at a short distance, into the large cave of which Arthur had already had a glimpse.

Speaking a few words to the Doctor in the Irish tongue, the old woman suffered the little company to pass the door ; then carefully closing and fastening it, she led the way up the steps into the large cave. There was a fire burning against a rocky wall, the smoke from which was seen to pass through the same aperture as that which admitted what little daylight entered the cave. In a nook, partitioned off by planks and an old sail, stood a half-tester bed curtained with coarse linen check ; in this was the child they had come to see. She sat up supported by pillows—a few toys and picture-books lying round her. She was so greatly altered, so wasted and thin, that, except for the largeness and lustre of her beautiful Irish and expressive eyes, it would have been impossible for any one to realize the idea that she was one and the same with the child who had so short a time before travelled in the country coach. She looked brightly up when the Doctor advanced and spoke to

her ; but the next instant, seeing Mrs. Hexham and the children, she screamed and tried to hide herself under the bedclothes.

"Whisht, me darlint !" spoke the old woman in her native tongue ; "it's only the swate lady and the childer ye seed before. They've come far along the shore to say you."

"And we've come to ask you to ride out in the sunshine to-morrow in a little carriage that the good Doctor who has saved your life is going to lend us," said Mrs. Hexham. "And you shall come to our cheerful house, and we will show you all the pretty things we can."

Encouraged by these words, and by the old woman's caresses, the child again showed her face, and in reply said, "A dog?"

"Yes : Lufra, my own pet, and others that our man takes care of."

"A puss too?"—for Kathie spoke English with tolerable ease.

"Well, I cannot be sure of puss ; he is given to roving, and is away now. He lives either in the woods—where he feeds on young rabbits, birds and squirrels—or he has found a home elsewhere, for he returns to us as sleek as can be." And Mrs. Hexham glanced at Dr. Marlow.

"And I've Shavy," exclaimed the child, with the mental inconstancy of childhood. "Shavy, Shavy, come here !"

As soon almost as she had spoken, an old she-goat, with two pretty kids, came from some shadowy part of the cave, and laid its bearded chin on the bed. Of course the other children were immediately attracted by all three ; and the kids, in spite of old Shavy's butting, were lifted up and dandled like kittens.

It was some minutes before the commotion was subdued,—this being only effected by the return of Mrs. Shavy and her little ones to bed. And when again the child was questioned

as to the morrow, she nestled to her nurse and began to cry.

"She *must* be removed from here," said the Doctor gravely, "or she will die. To obtain her consent, so she go willingly, will go far to effect a cure. Arthur, show her the picture-books."

Arthur sat down on the bed, and showed her his favourite "Robinson Crusoe," and a pretty volume of "The Arabian Nights' Entertainments." Still she cried on, and kept repeating in Irish, "I won't leave the old mourvreen."

"She is still weak and ill," said the Doctor, in an undertone, "and must be forgiven for much of this petulance."

"Kathie," he continued, "look at the pretty books ; look at their pretty pictures. There are many more at the Grange for you to look at."

"I won't go," she replied. "I want to be here, with Shavy and the mourvreen."

"The mourvreen is going too," the Doctor replied. But though he said this again and again, Kathie cried on and fondled to her nurse.

"Freda," said the Doctor again, in an undertone, "have you brought a doll? If you have, it may be talismanic."

The two little girls produced the doll, and leaning across the bed, pressed it into Kathie's hands.

"Look at it, dear," they said. "See its pretty hair, its bonnet, and shoes. It opens and shuts its eyes. See! Its name is Sophy."

Kathie's attention was soon aroused. She looked and admired, and in five minutes more she was all smiles, and freed from old Norah's arms, had her own round Freda and Iole's neck. In another moment the doll was undergoing the process of undressing, and all three were chattering and busy. So soon as the child was thus amused, the Doctor talked to the old woman, and interpreted what was said to

Mrs. Hexham. In this way they arranged that Pat and the children should fetch Kathie in the morning to the Grange, that Norah should accompany her and remain so long as was necessary, and after that go to and fro at will. If Kathie was happy, and her health improved, she was to remain till warning was given of her father's return to the neighbourhood of Morr. Norah could then remove her.

The boys, seeing that they were unobserved, while the rest were thus earnestly engaged, stole away to look about them. The cave appeared to have many outlets and windings, some of which probably led upwards to the solitary moorlands lying high above the shore, for strong draughts blew down apparently from the outer air. In some the fall of water could be distinctly heard; and in one case, where this sound was really fearful, as though a cataract poured down, the way was stopped by a stout barricade of timber. Other passages were blocked up by rude walls of stone, not more than breast high, and a few had stout doors. One of such doors stood open; two opened with latches. The light was very dim in these three caves, but they could just make out that they were variously filled with kegs of spirit, cases of wine and cigars, bags of tobacco and spice, and with bundles which, from their weight and softness, held probably manufactured goods.

"Arthur," said Walter in a whisper, "wouldn't it be nice to explore this place by ourselves—to bring a lantern, and spend half a day in it? If the old woman comes to the Grange, and passes any time there, mightn't we try?"

"We will," replied Arthur. "I'm quite sure we shall find some outlet or another in the moorlands above the shore. Denis says the places where smugglers hide have usually as many outlets as a fox's den. But we had better not be missed; so come on."

As they returned into that portion of the cave which

caught the ruddy light of the fire, they saw before them a recess which, partly filled with household necessities, had, at a hand's reach above, a wide shelf. On this were stored pistols, cutlasses, and what appeared to be nautical instruments. Conspicuous above all—for it was reared in a corner—was a large telescope : from its size undoubtedly of great magnifying power.

"Look there—*there*," said Arthur, forgetting for a moment in his intense excitement the necessity of speaking in a low voice ; "what a grand telescope ! If we could borrow that of old Norah, we should soon be as wise as Dr. Grimwig. Edith—mamma I ought to say—has locked up the one I brought to Morr."

"Why?"

"That we mayn't go spying about the castle. She fancies I am curious."

"We are both curious, if that's it," replied Walter ; "but as soon as we can go to and fro to the isle, we'll try and borrow this telescope, and make observations for ourselves. And what's more, Arthur, the very next holiday we have, and can get rid of old Denis—for I believe he is at Morr to watch all our doings—we will hunt on the moors behind here for one of the entrances to the cave, and perhaps we may find more than one."

"We will," was the emphatic answer. And then the boys returned and stood again at the rear of the group gathered about Kathie's bed. Their absence had been unobserved.

It was well they had returned, for Mrs. Hexham and Dr. Marlow were about to leave. Their arrangements had been made with old Norah ; and Kathie, being privileged to retain "Miss Sophy" all night, had promised to go to the Grange on the morrow, provided the *mourvreen* went with her. As this had already been proposed, it was gladly assented to, and she had only to part with her little friends, which she

did with many kisses and childlike promises. Old Norah lighted the little company to the secret door, and then carefully closed and secured it behind them.

As soon as they were safely in sight of the Grange, Dr. Marlow wished Mrs. Hexham and the children "good-night," and then took another path; and once indoors, the latter went to bed, for it was quite ten o'clock, and they were very tired. Harold and Lucy had been there a long time.

But Mrs. Hexham, as was her habit often, went into her studio for a short hour's work. Some thought had perhaps occurred to her, some object worth representation had come before her sight; and on this night her artist's eye had been greatly struck with the bending, weird-like figure of the old nurse, as she lighted them from the inner to the outer cave, and the memorial, made whilst it was vivid, might serve, she thought, for some future piece of work, either in painting or sculpture.

As she thus sat, making several slight sketches on the first pieces of paper which came to hand, she was conscious that some one passed and repassed, more than once, the oriel window towards the avenue. She even fancied that she heard the gable door open and shut; but presuming that Denis was out after some of the dogs, or the cattle, which for that and some previous days had been pasturing in the avenue, she felt neither fear nor curiosity.

When her sketches were made, she went to bed, and had probably slept some time, when she became suddenly conscious that Lufra was scratching against the door, and growling in an undertone. Sitting up and listening, she heard distinctly the repetition of the sounds which had aroused and alarmed her the night she reached Morr. She was now sensible that more than one person was in the room beneath; and though they moved with extreme caution, nearly all their movements were audible to her acute ear. Resolved

to fathom, if possible, this mystery—if one it were—she rose, put on her dressing-gown and slippers, and stole down the wide staircase. On repairing to bed, she had locked, as was her habit, the studio door on the outer side ; but now, passing her hand softly across the lock, she was made aware that the key had been removed to the inner side. She therefore stole gently away to a side door, opening from a vaulted passage near the kitchen. This, as she expected, was unbarred, for those who had unlocked the studio door towards the hall must have passed this way ; she therefore opened it without sound, and keeping in its shadow, reached the oriel window and peered within. As she fully expected, Dr. Marlow was in the room, and with him was the servant in plain clothes she had observed when making her observations through the telescope. A large shallow case or box stood on one of the tables, and in this the Doctor and servant were placing her painting of the lakes. This they did with the utmost care ; and then, resting the case on his arm, the servant opened the intervening doors—for there were two—and passed through the gable to the outer air. For a moment Dr. Marlow lingered behind. First he examined the little sketches she had made of Norah that very night ; then, gathering them up, he placed them in an inner pocket. Then he passed to the easel from which he had taken the painting of the lakes. Here he bent down—for what she could not see, though she fancied a brush or the maulstick which she had left upon the ledge was pressed momentarily against his heavy beard. He then blew out his lantern, and passing through, locked the gable doors. A vehicle was in waiting close by, for a moment after she heard it roll away.

She returned to bed without fear or surprise. There was a mystery connected with the castle ; but it was one of innocent sorrow, she now felt sure,—some painful case of necessary isolation from the world, which doctor, relatives

and servants sought alike to mitigate. And why should she intrude upon that which was so diligently, and wisely, without doubt, concealed? She felt sure that in time she should have its solution ; for she knew what philosophers say is true, that there exist no mysteries but what in time will be revealed. As to the removal of her picture—for critical purposes, no doubt—why should she complain? It was her employers', not hers. So cherishing this spirit of gentle wisdom, she fell asleep, though disturbed by a dream in which Arthur's and Walter's ingress into the castle by a turret window much disturbed her.

The morning was fine and clear. The girls were early astir ; for they had to put the dolls in their best clothes, set Lucy's dolls' house in order, and hunt up all their playthings so as to have them ready for Kathie's amusement. The boys were not so eager ; they wished to be off to the isle, and there mark out the foundations of their house ; but as they knew that they must show Dr. Marlow their plans first, they proceeded to look over and correct what they had drawn. So when Edith came down she found them busy in the schoolroom with pencils and paper. On entering the studio she saw her painting in its accustomed place ; but the key was inside the door, and this assured her that what she had seen had been a reality and not a dream.

While they were at breakfast, a servant brought an invalid chair from the castle, and with it a note from Dr. Marlow, to say that the boys must meet him that afternoon between two and three on the shore opposite the isle. As Mrs. Hexham wished to go to the lakes to paint, they settled to dine early, and set off on the ponies directly after. The three girls were to stay at home and amuse and take care of Kathie—an arrangement which greatly pleased them.

At ten o'clock they set off for the cave ; Pat and the boys drawing the chair, the girls in turn taking their place therein.

Being hung on many springs, and lined with the softest cushions, a more luxurious vehicle could hardly be ; but there was need of these aids to easy locomotion, for the shore was very rough, and in places hardly passable. But the waves rolled in, in all their freshness and grandeur ; the sands were newly washed ; and the rocks covered with lichens and sea-weeds, and the moorlands with shrubs, fern and heather, showed tints of many hues and wonderful beauty.

Most probably to avoid any further revelations of the secrets of the cave, old Norah had anticipated their journey half way ; for they found her at a point where the higher cliffs began, and where the moorland stretching down met the shore. She had tenderly carried Kathie so far, and here the wan and feeble child lay enjoying the sweet air and the warm sun. She was well wrapped up, and a bed of mingled fern and heather, which the old nurse had gathered, lay between her and the sward. She was delighted to see the children, and when she had been lifted into the chair, and the boys began to draw it, her pleasure was extreme. Still she kept a vigilant eye on her nurse, the nurse in turn stooping and speaking to her in the Irish tongue. Much of what was thus said Pat interpreted to Mrs. Hexham and the children ; and thus pleasantly they passed on to the Grange. Here the chair was placed on the lawn, and the girls, fetching their playthings, amused the happy child. But as soon as she had partaken of some light and nourishing food Forbes brought out to her, she fell into a profound sleep. Covering her carefully up, old Norah produced a pipe and some knitting from her pocket, and sitting down on the grass watched beside her ; at intervals singing in a low and plaintive voice a monotonous lullaby. This being a holiday, the children did not go into school ; and Mrs. Hexham, opening one of the studio windows, made another sketch of Norah.

Those already taken were not missing, for though abstracted as she had seen, they had been carefully returned.

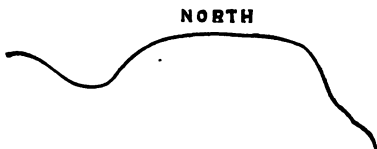
The day progressed, and Kathie did not wake ; so after dinner Mrs. Hexham and the boys departed, leaving her in the care of the girls and Norah. The latter, though silent and reserved even to those who could speak her language, was respectful and deeply grateful.

To Mrs. Hexham's and the boys' astonishment, they found, when they reached the lake, that the piling between the shore and the isle had not only been repaired, but that a bridge of planks, with a stout rail on either side, had been laid over them. They all, therefore, rode over it ; and the boys, dismounting, unsaddled their ponies and left them to graze. But Edith did not alight ; she simply rode a few times up and down, viewing each beautiful scene as it opened before her. When she gained the point from which she could see it clearly, she perceived that the balcony to the window in the northern tower was finished, and that the window itself stood open. Gazing at this, an intensified glare of light suddenly crossed her vision, and she thence concluded that a speculum or mirror of great magnifying power lined it on either side. If so, from the position of the window, all the surface of the isle in this direction was plainly visible ; and thus the house-building might be watched in all its details. Such was the opinion she arrived at, but she kept it to herself. After cautioning the boys not to venture too near the deeper portions of the lake, she returned to the shore, and soon was seated at work on the customary upland. She was to paint till four o'clock ; and then Walter and Harold were to go to her, and boiling the kettle, make her a cup of tea. Often, since the day referred to, she had had one ; for the kettle and tea-things, protected by a little roofing of bark, lay in some bushes hard by.

Scarcely had she ridden away, when Dr. Marlow crossed

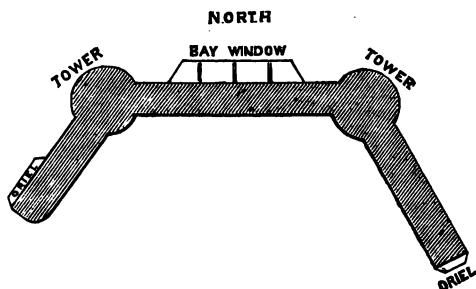
to the isle. Taking his seat on a grassy mound, he examined the boys' plans for the house. Some were childish enough—mere huts, such as savages would build; but two of Arthur's displayed a higher power. He had read in some book of architecture the golden law that the style of a building should grow out of and be subordinate to its purpose, and that for it to be a truth in art it should not only be suitable to the purpose it was to serve, but be adapted to the character of the spot whereon it was to be built. Hence he had remembered that a place in which six children were to play and invite their friends must be something more than a round or square enclosure with a roof, and that the nature of the ground and the character of the scenery required adaptive care. The isle, at the point where they were required to build, was

shaped somewhat thus:—the northern bank shelving sharply to a shallow in the lake. Thus his plan



lent itself, as it were, to the shore. It would be desirable to catch every possible point of view: the distant ocean, the upland between the sea and lake, the picturesqueness of the castle, the more distant lakes as they penetrated into the shadow of the hills, and the forest-land to the north and north-east. So he figured his house of one story and two towers, as shown on the next page. The north-west tower was to rise higher than the other, in order to look over the upland to the ocean; and beneath the bay-window looking up the lakes and facing the north was to be the kitchen and dairy, prettily hidden by arbutus shrubs, and yet with ample space on the pebbly shore. Steps descending from the north-east tower would lead to these.

Though much pleased with this plan and the ideas involved therein, Dr. Marlow thought it far too ambitious for boys to construct, and he frankly said so; but Arthur assured him he could build a tower on a small scale, for he had watched masons at work; and that the stone, from being so abundant and so beautifully fitted to walls, whether straight, curved, or circular, would make their labour in building easy. So, after much consideration, this plan was selected; though Arthur was sensible enough to see what the Doctor insisted on—that the house should be built by degrees. If they failed in the beginning of their ambitious attempt, it would be easy to pull down and recommence on a humbler plan.



Just as this decision was arrived at, old Mike came. At the Doctor's request he sharpened a number of small stakes, and Arthur having with him a rule and line, measurements were at once made, and the plan in part staked out. As Harold was not much interested in these details, and had begun to love Mrs Hexham dearly, and even to call her "mother," he had gone off long before, and lighting a fire, had made her her favourite cup of tea. When she had taken it, and the tea-kettle and other articles had been returned to their place beneath the bushes, he sat down beside her, for he loved to watch her paint.

The plan for the house thus chosen and settled, Dr. Marlow followed—thoughtful as usual, and as usual stroking his heavy beard. Telling Harold he was wanted on the island, he kept silence till the boy had departed, and then, taking a seat on the turf, he spoke enthusiastically of Arthur as a boy of daring and genius ; next of the plan for the house ; and presently, looking over the picture, he criticised it in detail.

“More shadow here,” he said ; “more light on those distant hills.”

“I think so too,” she replied gently ; “your critic, Dr. Marlow, has fine taste.”

“Yes,” was the quiet answer.

“The more I have of this criticism,” she said, “the better the picture will be. Sometimes I have doubts, sometimes I have difficulties. What author or artist has not? When these occur, may I appeal to this critic?”

“Through me,” was the sententious answer.

“Certainly : I have no other intention. I am genuinely desirous to make progress in my art, and to paint as good a picture as I can.”

“Of this we are all sure. With care it will be an extremely fine version of one of Nature’s fairest scenes ; and give, I am certain, the highest pleasure to its critic. This is all I may venture to say.”

He dropped the subject ; and after conversing awhile longer in respect to Kathie, he went his way.

When the fading light permitted Edith to paint no longer, she packed her picture, easel, and painting materials, and mounting Jove, who docilely grazed hard by, she rode down to the lake and summoned the boys. They were still busy marking out their plan, and were sorry to leave ; but they obeyed instantly, though promising themselves the delight of returning and beginning work early in the morning. Mounting

their ponies, they all rode off at a quick pace, and rounding the headland, were soon at home and busy at supper.

The three girls had much to tell Mrs. Hexham about Kathie, who, being still so great an invalid, had been put to bed at an early hour. When she awoke in the afternoon they had amused her by dressing and undressing the dolls, rearranging the dolls' house, and laying out their toy dinner, dessert, and tea services. Next they read her the prettiest, easiest story they could find in their gayest picture-book; and when it was done, Lucy played and sang. The music greatly charmed her; and whilst so listening, she fell asleep again. Often through the day she had said she loved the little girls dearly—Freda the most, because she was the oldest; and so it was whilst nestling to her she fell into a deep slumber. The old nurse being called in, carried the weak and weary child to a pleasant room at the rear of the house. This, with other rooms, occupied a half-detached portion of the Grange, and opening by a common staircase to the courtyard, were easily accessible. Cut off from all communication with the more private portions of the house, both Forbes and Mrs. Hexham thought it best to give Kathie and her nurse lodging there. It was most likely that the habits of the old woman would not accord with those of the household,—that she would need to go to and fro at will; and though, from what was known of her, and the position she had held in Quinlivan's household in his better days, there was no fear of her being dishonest or otherwise wicked, still it was considered wise to disconnect her as much as possible from the inmates of the Grange whilst the child for charity's sake was an inmate. Thus Kathie had a pleasant room, and old Norah one beside it; the staircase hard by allowing her to go forth and return at any hour,—a privilege of which she soon and tacitly availed herself, for when Mrs. Hexham and Forbes visited the child, the last thing before they went to bed, Norah was

absent, though in the morning, as soon as the maids were astir, the old woman presented herself at the dairy hatch and begged milk for her darling, who was then awake. Thus auspiciously begun, Kathie was soon reconciled to her life at the Grange. Day by day she gathered strength, and missed her nurse when absent less and less, though dearly attached to her. Shavy and her little ones were brought from the cave; and, what with being often fed on nice pieces of soft bread and biscuit, and daily cropping the sweet luxuriant herbage about the Grange, they were soon as sleek as could be. Denis and Pat made them a nice bed in one of the outhouses; and thus Shavy and her children were as happy as their dear little mistress.

The preparations for house-building went on slowly, but well. More stones were brought from the shore, and those previously carried were taken over to the isle. Two long days' journeys were made to "Timber Cove," and long planks and other wood brought thence. Some trees were felled in the woods, and the woodmen shaped them ready for the sawyers; and old Mike and Denis, purposely making search in some old vaults beneath the castle, found two great cauldrons. These were carried to the isle; and sand, hair, and lime taken there also. Old Mike also showed the boys how to pound certain kinds of shells found abundantly on the shore. These, from extremely long exposure to the elements, were very hard and white—forming, when pounded, a sort of lime; which, mixed with other ingredients and used hot, after a method similar to that practised by the Romans in this country and elsewhere, made a cement which was all but imperishable.

Without neglecting any of their studies, the boys worked as hard as any labourers. It soon became a custom, on those days they attended school in the tower, for Pat to take their dinners to them, after which they rode away to the

isle ; thus saving the time of going to and returning from the Grange. Indeed, had they been willing to neglect their duty for pleasure, Dr. Marlow would not have suffered them to do so ; for on one occasion, when they fell a little short of his high mark in several of their lessons, he sternly forbade any expedition to the isle for a full week,—a punishment so severe as to make them cautious never to offend again.

In about a month from the date of marking out their plan, they had, with some assistance from Mike, dug the foundations of the eastern side of the house, laid the stones, and poured over and around them the boiling mortar.

CHAPTER V.

THE HUNDRED STEPS.

IT was the prettiest sight in the world to see the boys at work. Forbes had made them strong blouses, and leather leggings and stout shoes had been sent for from some distant town ; and thus they had no worry about spoiling their clothes. Indeed, their labours rather added to than took away from the picturesqueness of the isle ; for the flame and smoke of the great wood fire that roared beneath the cauldron played upon the water and curled amid the trees and bushes, and the piles of weather-beaten as also fresh-sawed timber, and the heaps of gray and jagged stones were in striking contrast to turf, trees and water. And when presently the foundations began to rise above the ground, new effects were produced.

But before the boys' work had progressed thus far, Mrs. Hexham finished her picture. She had no frame for it, and knew not where to procure one, unless from England ; so she had to send it to its owner without. Taking advantage of Miss Haller's return home in the carriage one evening, after giving both girls and boys their usual lessons in German, French and music, she sent it by her, with a brief note to Lady Mary Clare. Early on the morrow a groom brought an answer, in which that Lady said she was "deputed to give her warmest thanks for her faithful and

beautiful rendering of one of the fairest scenes of western Ireland, and to enclose bank-notes for £200." To this she added, "that if from time to time Mrs. Hexham would make some little water-colour sketches of the scenes on the island whilst house-building and other Robinson Crusoe operations were being carried on, she would much oblige."

Two hundred pounds! Edith was amazed. The Ladies Clare had already been so generous and kind as to remove from her thoughts all desire and expectation of reward. On the contrary, she felt that she had to repay old obligations rather than incur new ones. This she expressed in her note of thanks; at the same time she added how deep was her joy in hearing that her picture had satisfied her more than generous patron."

She was, however, sorry to be asked to sketch, just then, any of the island scenes. Autumn was at hand, and every hour she could spare from her other duties was precious, for she wanted to make some preliminary sketches for pictures of coast scenery—in which, expending all her artistic skill, she might finely depict one or more of those wild and awful solitudes which the boys had often described to her. She could paint them during the winter, making her labour connected with them a pleasant variation from that of modelling, which would be her principal work.

Resolving to achieve all she could both as to the island and coast scenery, and wishing to select a scene connected with the latter at once, she set off early one morning with Freda, Walter and Harold. Denis and Mike attended. Avoiding the rugged and often impassable shore, they wound round the seaward end of the lake to the woods, and after passing some way through them, they gained the road used in bringing wreck timber from the shore. It passed over a series of rock-strewn moorlands; and these increasing in altitude as they approached the sea, Edith was enabled to

survey from a safer point of view those various scenes the boys had described so graphically to her. She made a sketch of the rocks about the "Devil's Net," another of the "Timber Cove," and then, a mile more north, of a scene of wild and indescribable grandeur, where rocks and ocean contended, as it were for the mastery. This latter she resolved to paint first, though many visits would be required to sketch accurately that wide expanse of foam and desolate rocks ; but as these visits, if taken separately, would involve much waste of time and great fatigue, she consulted Mike and Denis as to the possibility of finding in the neighbourhood some temporary shelter, where she could lodge for a few consecutive days till the sketch was completed. Denis soon recollected that in a picturesque and sheltered glen, about a mile inland, was a substantial hut, occasionally used by coastguardsmen. It was not always tenanted, and when the men were away it was kept locked ; but by proper application at the chief coastguard station of the district he could easily procure the key, and most likely, were a few necessary appliances and comforts conveyed thither, Mrs. Hexham might be able to occupy it for a short time. Accordingly, a few days afterwards, leave was obtained ; and when a bed, a few culinary utensils, and plenty of provisions had been sent beforehand, Edith, guided by Pat and accompanied by Lufra, set off early one morning. Mike was to be messenger between the hut and the Grange ; Freda, as the eldest girl, would take charge of the others ; Forbes was to preside at meals ; and Dr. Marlow promised to keep, as far as he could, a watch over the boys. "Busy as they were with their house-building, they were not," he said, "likely to fall into mischief."

On the morning but one after Mrs. Hexham's departure, the children had not been long in school, before some one entered the basement of the tower, and ascending the

winding stairs with quick step, knocked at the room door. Dr. Marlow started to his feet, went without, and returning hurriedly, told the children he was wanted and must go. "They must lock up the tower," he added, "and employ themselves for the rest of the day at home."

"Mayn't we stay and wait for our dinner here, sir?" asked Arthur ruefully: "we boys were going to the island this afternoon, to get the east wall above the ground."

"No! no house-building to-day. No further visit to the isle till I give leave. There are your ponies, and plenty to amuse you at the Grange." Dr. Marlow said nothing further, but went.

The children watched him leave the tower followed by a liveried servant, who, admitting him through the door in the park wall, opened the entrance gate to the Hundred Steps, and followed closely after. The man must have used pass-keys of his own, for when the two elder boys began to clear the table—as they had been ordered, and as was their custom—they found three behind some books on Dr. Marlow's desk. They were tied together, and were the keys he used, they knew, for they had seen them in his hand. Usually he kept them in his pocket, though once or twice before they had seen them on the desk, but never near enough to examine them minutely. The girls were in the old room above, tying on their hats, and Harold had gone downstairs to saddle the ponies.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Walter: "here are Dr. Grimwig's keys." And he looked at Arthur.

"Yes; but I am certain they will soon be missed,—perhaps a servant sent after them. If we could keep them for a short time we would see the Hundred Steps."

"So we would," replied Walter; "but they're not keys of very modern make. This clumsy and rusty thing belongs, I know, to the grated door at the foot of the Steps. Suppose

we were to hunt among the old stores in the room above : we might find keys like them in some of the chests."

"What a capital thought !" was Arthur's whispered answer ; "let us get the girls away, and we'll begin the hunt at once. Freda !"—here he called to his sister—"you and the others had better not stand chattering. Make haste home, and tell Forbes not to send our dinner here."

Thus counselled, the girls were soon downstairs, in the saddle, and away. As Harold would be useful in keeping watch, he was called up, admitted into their confidence, and stationed at a window from which, without being observed, the park wall could be seen.

As soon as they had cleared the tables the two boys hurried up to the room above, and commenced their search. The lids of the larger part of the chests were unlocked, so that by merely raising them the contents could be seen. After turning over a great deal of rubbish in several, they came to one in which, beneath a thick layer of flags and bunting, lay several hundred old keys. Turning them out, and bringing them to the light, they found two tied together. When compared with two of those left by Dr. Marlow, they were seen to be alike ; and the probability was that those from the chest were duplicate keys of doors connected with the Hundred Steps. Resolving, if possible, to test this, they replaced the contents of the chest, left Dr. Marlow's keys on his table, locked up the tower, placed the key which opened it in its accustomed place, and then went through the ruins to the door in the park wall. But neither of the keys would fit the lock ; they therefore clambered over the wall, and tried their skill upon the grated door. After some little difficulty the key turned in the wards, and the door, with a push, opened.

"How capital !" whispered Arthur ; "let us go in a little way, if only to see where the Steps lead to."

The others readily assenting, the three crept forward up a flight of dark, narrow, and very steep steps or stairs, cut, as it seemed, in the natural rock. After a short time all light ceased ; but they crept on, and were soon sensible that the steps took a somewhat zigzag direction, and that occasionally on either side were recesses more or less deep ; but whether these opened anywhere they could not tell, for the gloom was too intense for them to see, and without light it was probably dangerous to explore them.

The steps seemed interminable ; for they had already counted more than a hundred when a glimmer of light high up in the distance showed itself ; and 'as this grew clearer and clearer (for it enlarged as they advanced) they became aware that far up, and at the distance of many steps—as many or more as they had climbed—was another grated iron door. But they had not advanced much farther when this growing light was suddenly obscured, and an instant after came a sound as though some one unlocked the door with the intention of descending. As quick as lightning they returned—indeed, almost tumbling over each other in their hurry. They gained the door, re-locked it, climbed the wall, hid the tower key in its accustomed place, and then concealed themselves behind some ruined brickwork which, thickly covered with ivy, permitted them to see without being seen. They were scarcely safe, before the same servant who had summoned Dr. Marlow passed through the park wall, made for the tower, unlocked the door, went in, brought forth the keys, and then retraced his steps. Thus baffled in their curiosity, and not daring to be absent at the approaching dinner-hour, they returned to the Grange, speculating all the way as to when it would be best to make another visit to the Hundred Steps. Arthur thought that very night. Mrs. Hexham was absent, Forbes and the two maids would be in bed ; and if they could obtain a lantern



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and leave the house unobserved, they were likely to gratify their curiosity without fear of detection. Their greatest difficulty would be Denis. He was, as it were, ubiquitous. He was here, there, and everywhere, at all seasons ; and his absence could rarely be depended on. But they determined to make an attempt.

Accordingly, instead of a ramble on the moors behind the smugglers' cave, and in which the girls were to accompany them, they all three pretended to be busy with some matters for their house—a search for large nails, or something of that sort ; and thus, ridding themselves of Freda and the rest, they hunted up a large old lantern, fed it with oil from some of Denis's stores ; and next searched for and obtained some long pieces of rope. With the latter they made a sort of ladder—tying two stones at one end, as a weight. With this they hoped to descend from one of their bedroom windows, and, on their return early in the morning, take the chance of entering the house unseen ; for the doors were always opened at an early hour, and it would be thought that they were returning from a bathe in a rocky hollow on the shore.

To avoid suspicion as to their movements, they played a game of blind-man's-buff with the girls after tea—Kathie joining a little in it, for she had rapidly gained strength, and her partiality for Arthur increasing, she cried if she were not permitted to share in any amusement in which he took a part. At last the much wished for bed-time came ; and the lantern being carefully hidden in a place near the house, so as to be ready when they passed, and the rope-ladder carried upstairs, they waited impatiently till all was still. They had got into bed with their clothes on, till Forbes made her usual visit to see the lights were safe, and then they rose. But time seemed to pass slowly, for Denis had a habit of keeping out and about the Grange long after all

were a-bed, and this night he seemed longer than usual ; but at last they heard his shoes creak up the back stairs, and all was still. Harold had fallen asleep, but they aroused him ; and then, opening one of the windows in Walter's room, as being that most likely, from its remoteness, to be unheard, they descended carefully and without accident. Their greatest difficulty was to remove the ladder and close the window ; but this Walter, who was an excellent climber, at length effected by resting his feet on some ornamental stonework. Thus free, they hid the ladder, got the lantern, sped on by the secluded way of the avenue, and reached the park wall without accident. Climbing this, they unlocked the grated door, lighted the lantern, and began the ascent of the so-called Hundred Steps—though in reality there were at least three hundred.

Without, the night was dark, and the gloom, as they ascended higher and higher, became intense ; this the more that, from the cave-like nature of the air, their light burnt dimly. The steps were very steep, and so narrow as hardly to admit two abreast ; but now and then the recesses on either hand gave greater space. Some of these were mere man-holes—such as are seen in long railway tunnels—but a few were much larger. Of these some were heaped up with old cannon-balls, rusty iron, or piles of rotting wood ; others had their extremities closed by stout doors—opening, it might be, to dungeons or to solitudes buried in the foundations of the castle.

At length they thought it prudent to leave the light behind them in one of the recesses, for they knew they were approaching the gate at the head of the steps. Stealing on very softly, one after the other, they soon saw, by a strong light beyond, that this gave access to a large vaulted hall or chamber, evidently forming some portion of the ground-floor of the more domestic portions of the castle, and which,

from several flights of stairs leading into it, was the means of intercommunication between one part and another.

Approaching the grated door as near as they dared, and through its interstices scanning wistfully every feature of the ancient place—for it was well lighted—Arthur was about to try the remaining key in the lock of the gate, when, quite distinctly, steps could be heard descending one of the internal staircases, and a moment after Dr. Marlow appeared in sight. He wore a loose undress coat, and carried a small safety-lamp in his hand. Unlocking a door in the further part of the hall, he disappeared for some minutes. Returning with two small bottles and a glass measure, he was about to ascend the same staircase, when a middle-aged, well-dressed woman, carrying a small covered basin on a tray, stepped briskly forward from an opposite direction, and made some inquiry in a low tone.

“Better—decidedly better. The after prostration from the fainting fit is not so great as it sometimes is. Tell Lady Mary she may now retire to rest with an easy mind. And Lady Isabel——”

“We persuaded her to go to bed an hour ago, Dr. Marlow, and she has now fallen asleep. Her alarm was extreme.”

“Without cause, Graham. Assure Lady Mary of my watchful care. Good-night!” And the doctor and the waiting-woman went their several ways.

Perhaps Dr. Marlow, on reaching some of those splendid rooms which overlooked the lake, had given egress to the dogs that usually accompanied him; for certain it was that, a minute or so after, Nero and three or four others came bounding down the staircase, and rushing to the gate with lashing tails and glaring eyes, beat on it with their great paws, as though to tear it down. Their deep baying resounded through the castle, and came back in still more awful echoes.

Some servants on duty, or else sitting up, hearing the noise, rushed into the hall, and strove to appease the angry animals. But in vain : Nero would neither be still, nor leave the grating against which he had reared himself.

"Something is amiss," said one of the men ; "I never saw Nero like this before. He has been uneasy since noon yesterday."

"At the rats, perhaps," said another servant.

"It can't be," spoke a third. "Phin M'Carthy and his ferrets were here three weeks ago."

"Well, we'd better call Johnstone," said the one who had first spoken : "he keeps the keys."

It was not needful to call Johnstone, for at this moment he appeared upon the scene : a thickset burly man, who, having been suddenly aroused out of bed, and dressing hastily, looked anything but the pompous personage he was by day, and when, as head-porter of a magnificent castle, he sat ensconced in his chair of state in the great hall. Taking a bunch of keys from a shallow wainscot closet, he proceeded to unlock the gate.

Meanwhile, as soon as the dogs were heard to bay and the servants appeared upon the scene, the boys, conscious of their danger, retreated far more quickly than they came. When they reached the recess in which they had left the lantern, their terror grew, for they saw, from the number of steps which remained, that they could never traverse even a third of them before the dogs, if let loose, would be upon them. And if they did, they would be torn to pieces, as they knew.

"Let us stop here !" cried Harold, in an agony of terror.

"We can't," said Arthur, seizing the lantern. "Come on."

"Try the door : I hear the dogs !" called Walter. "There isn't a moment to lose !" And seizing a projection in the

thick nail-studded door as he spoke, it most fortunately yielded to the pressure of his hand, and in a moment more all three were standing in a cavernous recess, with the door between them and their pursuers.

"Put the lantern at the rear," called Walter, "so its light may not be seen through any chink. And here! help me to pile up these old cannon-balls: no one can push the door open then. Quick! quick! I hear both dogs and men!"

Not a minute too soon! The boys, setting down the lantern, plied their task. A great confused heap of balls, old iron, and old planks and blocks of wood stood near; and these, one by one, they set up against the door. It was a very stout door, and as the mass rose their safety grew. But in their trepidation and hurry they incidentally made some noise. A heavy ball rolled down, and the sound passed beyond the door, and traversed the great deep of steps in ascending and descending echoes. The logs and pieces of timber, in settling, also fell against the door and shook it heavily; so that the dogs bounding down the steps, and the men after them—the former tracking the children's footsteps—stopped suddenly and bayed against the door.

"Here, Nero!" shouted a voice. Nero tore at the door with his great paws, and bayed again.

"It's only rats," called another, in a gruff and querulous voice; for it was the chief porter, and he had been aroused from his sleep.

"I'm sure it is," said another; "it can't be man or woman, for the door hasn't been opened for years."

"Not opened?" exclaimed another man; "I know better than that. Some of the others mayn't have been. A few are nailed up, I know, for they lead to great chasms in the rocks, and to ruined and dangerous flights of stairs. But *this* was open not six months ago. Why, I and one of

the carpenters moved some old wood and iron into the space within."

"You may be mistaken," said the gruff voice again ; "with so many doors a man's easily puzzled. Let me try it : I'll soon see." And the man beat upon the door heavily, and then tried it with his hand.

"You're all a pack of simpletons," he shouted ; "why, the door be nailed up, and nailed so stoutly that you and your generation won't open it. Come ! come on—call the dogs. It's hard for a man to be woke out of a good sleep, and all for nothing."

But Nero's opinion went one way, and the head-porter's another ; for he planted his huge paws against the door, as though he would not be moved, and bayed again and again.

"Come, Joe," spoke the porter, still more angrily, "pull that dog away, and let us go back again. Nero's full of whims ; the Doctor pets him so that he is fast becoming a spoilt cur. Robbers, indeed ! who could pass that gate below ? As to the smugglers, they only care for such a place to hide their kegs of brandy in ; and as to fellows who prowl along the coast, they'd need to hide themselves on account of their old tricks, rather than show any new ones. Come ! let the hound bay no more we shall have the sick folks frightened to death."

The porter, thus grumbling, retraced his steps, and the men, calling off the dogs, and removing Nero with apparent difficulty, followed him ; and from the stillness which presently reigned, the iron gate without doubt was closed, and the long flight of steps again left to its accustomed solitude.

The children listened with profound anxiety for this relief, and when it came they were most thankful. But safety and escape thus insured, they at once began to differ.

"Nero knew, as well as could be, that we were here," whispered Arthur.

"Yes ; and could he have got to us, he would have torn us to pieces," replied Walter, in an equally low voice. "Depend upon it, the next time he sees us he will give pretty sure signs of his anger. I am only very sorry we ever came. What we want to find out isn't, I am sure, worth the risk."

"No, indeed," added Harold, still trembling from excessive fear ; "I wouldn't for anything come again. And then, if uncle or Mrs. Hexham knew what we had done, what would they say or do?"

"Nothing !" replied Arthur : "what should they do ! Dr. Grimwig wouldn't cane me, I suppose ! And as to any long task he might set, why, I could soon learn *that*. We have certainly made one thing clear,—and that is that some one lives at the castle beside the Ladies Clare. A man, I'm sure it is, and who, I fancy, is always, or at least often, sick ; and to whom old Grimwig is doctor. The same person, too, employs mamma. The pictures she paints are for him, I am sure."

"Well, I really don't care if there is or is not a secret," said Walter ; "I'm not a coward, and I don't tremble, as Harold does, but I only know, if we get safe home, you'll not catch me climbing up these dismal steps again, or peeping into a bogie old castle, in which two old women—like Bluebeard—keep a secret."

"Hush !" replied Arthur ; "the Ladies Clare are most generous to us. But I don't like secrets—boys never like them—and if they have courage enough, they try to find them out. And *this*, if I stand alone, I'll find out, come what may."

"You *may* try," spoke Walter, "but you will not find it out."

"I *will*," said Arthur angrily. "I'm not a boy to be daunted—not I !"

"Well, do as you please," spoke Walter, angrily in turn ;
"I want to open the door and get home."

"Oh no, no—don't !" whimpered Harold, who was by nature very timid ; "please don't. Nero is there, I'm sure."

"There, stand behind that pile of wood, and you'll take no harm !" said Arthur. "Walter, let us pull away these things before the lantern burns out." And so both boys began tugging at the pile before them, and soon effected a clearance sufficient for the door to be drawn back, and for passage through. At first they opened the door very cautiously, bit by bit, peeping and listening as they did so. But they were soon assured that all was clear ; for Arthur, by creeping stealthily up a few dozen steps, presently saw that the trellised iron gate was closed, and a great bar drawn across it. It was, however, pretty clear that Nero and some of the large dogs were still in the hall, for they kept up a continuous growl, and so soon as the boys began to descend the steps, Nero in particular leapt up against the gate and bayed furiously. Well aware that prudence, in this instance at least, was the better part of valour, the boys rushed down the steps at their wildest speed ; in this headlong flight tumbling over each other, and greatly hurting their hands, shins and knees. Arthur was the first to reach the bottom ; but even he trembled so he could hardly place the key in the lock. Presently he did ; the gate opened, and they were safe ! But they had to drag Harold through, and carry him between them into the shelter of some bushes, for he was motionless through fear. However, as soon as possible, they helped him over the wall, and again sheltered him in the broken, bush-covered ground about the tower ; for it occurred to Arthur that the porter, his men, and the dogs might again appear. The elder boys then sought for the key in its accustomed hiding-place. When found, they

entered the tower, and helping Harold in, locked the door, and gained their schoolroom. Here they lay down on the old carpet which covered the floor, and worn out with fatigue and excitement, were soon asleep.

But, so far as Arthur was concerned, not for long ; for he was again aroused by Nero's bay, and this close at hand. He rose, and creeping softly to the window nearest the park wall, saw, as he expected, Dr. Marlow and the dog beneath ; the latter, so far as he could see in the dull light of a cloud-environed moon, lay stretched before the door, his nose upon his paws, and his tail swaying slowly and heavily from side to side.

"What is it, Ne ?" the Doctor asked again, as he patted his favourite on the head. At these words the stately creature rose, planted his forepaws on the door, and sniffed and scratched, but in a manner which rather expressed recognition than anger.

"What is it ? Shall we see ?" questioned the Doctor again. The animal answered by a whine.

"No very deadly enemies, I think, Ne ?" spoke the Doctor again. "Some sea-bird flitting about, as is often the case ; or some little animal from the woods unexpectedly entrapped." As he spoke, Dr. Marlow moved away to a crevice in some moss-covered stones, where the keys were usually kept ; but he could not, of course, find them. Then he lighted the small lantern he always carried, and sought in other crevices, and amid the grass around ; but here his search was equally unsuccessful.

"I suppose," he presently said aloud, "Denis has them at the Grange, or else the children. Well, it's no use lingering. There may or may not have been any one up and down the Hundred Steps, but here all seems still. The rats *are* troublesome, I know, especially in the lower parts of the castle ; and the dogs, of course, hate them. So come on, Ne :

just a run along the shore past the Grange, and home by the road. I shall sleep better for the run, after a weary, very weary day."

Dr. Marlow had returned towards the door to induce Nero to rise and come along with him ; and, speaking out distinctly, as was his wont, Arthur heard every word. But not till he had repeated his commands again and again, and at last in an angry and louder voice, did the great animal rise and follow his master. Even then it was with evident reluctance, and at a pace unusually slow. Habitually a rapid walker, the Doctor went quickly on, and was soon lost to view in the shadows of the night.

Arthur drew his breath more easily. "It was well I brought the key inside and locked the door," he thought, "or all would have been found out. It may be so even now ; for he has keys which open into the Grange, and, as mamma says, there is scarcely a night but what he visits the studio, —a not very agreeable custom, as she often adds. Indeed, if he suspects us, as she is away, he may go up into our rooms and find our empty beds. Well ! he can if he pleases—I for one don't care ; and though I'll say no more to Walter and Harold (the first especially) about old Dr. Grimwig's secret, I'll find it out, come what may. When I settle to do a thing, I *always* accomplish it."

Thus mentally resolving, he stretched himself out again upon the carpet and fell asleep. So deeply he slept, as did also Walter and Harold, that the sun had long risen, and shone in early glory over land and sea, when he, awoke and started to his feet. In a moment he recollected where he was, and, looking at the clock above the fireplace, saw it was just seven. There was not a moment to lose : breakfast was always early at the Grange—never later than half-past seven these early summer mornings. He roused up Walter and Harold ; and all three left the tower without a minute's delay,

locked the door, hid the key, and, hastening through the shrubs and rocks, gained the avenue without observation. Here they took their way more cautiously along a devious well-hidden path which ran beside it, and before long came in sight of the Grange. Most of the windows were open, and so was the front door, when, skirting round the house, they reached the porch. One of the maids was on her knees cleaning the hall, and an up-and-about air reigned through the place.

Even Arthur was a little disconcerted. It was just possible that their absence through the night had been discovered. Be this as it might, he had to face the difficulty.

"Milly," he said, addressing the girl with as much nonchalance as possible, "is breakfast ready?"

"Jist upon the ready, Masther Arthur. Misthress Forbes is throublin her heart about ye all, thinking ye've not been in bed the blissed night."

"Bed! why, where should we have been but in bed?" he replied; "they are tumbled about, I am sure; and boys are not like girls, snoring away till noon. The first gleam of sun wakes them. Why, we were off for a bathe and a run on the shore."

"Misthress Forbes did not think the sheets nor pillies crumpled wid th' lying in."

"Tut! we're not girls, and don't do as they do. Let us pass, Milly; we want our breakfast." And, so with as bold a face as he could assume, the daring boy led the way into the breakfast room, where the girls were already seated round the table, and Forbes about to take her place. The latter cast a keen and searching glance at Arthur, and Freda began to question him."

"Where have you been, Arthur? where have you all been?" she said. "We were up very early ourselves, hoping you would have a run with us on the shore; but when we

knocked at your doors, we got no answer. After a while Mrs. Forbes went in and found none of you there. Where have you all been? Do tell us."

"Where should we have been?" replied Arthur, a little contemptuously: "girls never reason. If we like to be up at dawn, so as to see a tide Mike told us of, what's that to you, and what right have you to question?"

"You must not be rude to your sister, Master Arthur," spoke Forbes, gravely; "you must take care what you do, for you're the ringleader if mischief is about. Your three beds have not been slept in, that's certain; and your weary looks are not without a cause."

"You'd be weary, Forbes, had you been running far along the rough shore."

"Perhaps so; and climbing down from windows. I have questioned Denis, and he says all the doors were fastened as usual when he came down this morning. So you must take care, Master Arthur; it may not be well to incur Dr. Marlow's severe displeasure, or to distress Mrs. Hexham so soon as she returns home." The housekeeper said no more, but gravely and silently dispensed the breakfast.

Freda resolved to question the younger boys so soon as she had an opportunity. But this did not occur, for before the morning was well advanced, Miss Haller drove down from the castle to give them their lessons in German and music, and to tell the boys that they must prepare for school the following morning, for in all probability Dr. Marlow would be sufficiently disengaged to attend at the usual hour. So they were all very busy, and Miss Haller, lunching when the children dined, did not return to the castle till the afternoon was far advanced. Tea shortly followed, and when it was over Freda asked Forbes if they might not play out on the lawn.

"Yes, all of you," replied the housekeeper; "and you,

Master Arthur, must draw Kathie a little up and down in the garden chair. She has been crying a good deal all day. The old mourvreen is in some distress, and is away just now ; and the child, missing her, frets very much. But if you draw her chair, her smiles will soon come back again, for she is very fond of you."

"I cannot," replied Arthur ; "the girls can play about if they like, but I and Walter have our Latin and mathematical lessons to get ready for the morning, and Harold must keep with us, for he has his grammar and geography to learn."

"They won't take any of you long to learn, I'm sure," said Freda : "they never do. And when you have done, you can come out to us. So go and begin at once, and we'll get Kathie and all the dolls, and try to amuse her till then. If Harold has done first, send him to us : next to you, Kathie likes him best."

So saying, Freda and the two other girls ran off to Forbes's room to fetch the child, and soon they were all seated on the lawn playing with the dolls. It was a divine evening ; and, as they thus sat grouped together on the grass in the rich sunlight, they were a picture fair to see. The dolls, of which there were a dozen or more, were gaily attired, and the pinks and greens and blues of their bonnets and dresses lent colouring and contrast to the pretty scene.

Arthur was quite aware that Freda would question Harold if she could get him alone with her ; so to prevent this had been his great aim all the day. Harold was an honourable boy, he knew, and not a tell-tale ; but he was timid, and should Freda say that she would tell Mrs. Hexham or his uncle if he did not answer her questions truthfully, he might be frightened, and so confide to her all relating to the Hundred Steps, and what occurred afterwards. If Harold could be kept quiet for a few days, Freda's curiosity might abate,

and their discovered absence through the night cease to be remembered.

Thus, when Harold, having mastered his lessons, wanted to run out to the girls, Arthur would not let him go.

"Can't you be quiet," he said, "and stop here? Freda wants to question you, you know; and you're such a muff, you will tell her all."

"No! I'm not a muff," was the indignant answer. "But I do think we all did wrong, and that our danger from those dogs was very great. I don't mind going over the wall into the park; but the Hundred Steps, why,——"

"Don't talk," interrupted Walter angrily; "I can't get my lessons."

"Nor I," said Arthur: "if you need something to keep you quiet, put a string where it is wanted on the handle of the bat, for you shan't go to Freda and the rest till we go."

So Harold, being by nature a gentle, docile boy, obeyed, and, from a corner crammed full of cricket bats, fishing rods, and countless other things of interest to lads, brought forth the bat needing repair, and, placing it on a centre table, began to wind some whipcord round its handle. Walter sat in the window-seat construing a certain passage in "Cæsar's Commentaries," and Arthur, as was his careless manner, lolled on the carpet in a distant corner nearest the kitchen, studying his lesson in Euclid for the morrow. Thus they were occupied, shadows beginning to fall within the room, for the sun was slowly sinking behind the western sea.

Though in a less degree, shadows began to fall upon the lawn; and the dolls' dresses and hats looked less bright in hue than they had done an hour before; yet Kathie hugged her favourite and chattered away, for the girls were all busy in behalf of Miss Doll, and the child thought that what they thus accomplished was perfect.

‘Oh ! I love you, I love you,’ she repeated ; ‘and I love the mourvreen. O the pretty hat ! O the flower ! The mourvreen will like it, and so will father when he comes on shore.’ She paused a moment, and then added, as she pointed seaward with her finger, ‘See ! there’s the Doctor and the big dogs.’

The children stopped sewing and looked round ; and there, true enough, Dr. Marlow had just stepped from the shore on to the lawn. As customary, four or five dogs were with him ; but, as an unusual circumstance, Nero stalked on before, his head aloft and his tail swaying angrily from side to side. When he reached the children, he sniffed them over carefully, again lifted his head in mid-air, and turned his muzzle towards the Grange. Delighted with the picture before him, and staying to speak to Kathie and her friends, Dr. Marlow was unconscious of the dog’s movements, or that, after a moment’s pause, it had bounded in fury towards the house, first towards the studio windows, then back again, and round the house to where the door of entrance lay.

He did not observe this ; but a wild howl, as that of an infuriated beast of prey, met his ear, followed by appalling and agonized human cries.

‘My God !’ he said : ‘that dog has seized some one and borne him down.’ As quick as might be, he followed on the footsteps of the brute round to the porch, through the hall, and in at the playroom door, which Forbes and Denis, alarmed by the cries, had rushed forward and opened. The sight before them was a terrible one. The dog, leaping through the open window, thence over the table, had seized Arthur by the shoulder as he lay on the floor with his books, and now stood over him with lashing tail and infuriated eyes.

‘Down, you brute ! down !’ was the Doctor’s cry as he seized Nero by his massive collar and tried to pull him

away. But with the only result that the dog loosened its cruel grasp of the boy's shoulder in a renewed attempt to seize him by the throat. This it had already struggled to do, but failed ; Arthur's lacerated and bleeding hands showing how manfully he had resisted the savage attack.

"Down, you brute !" and then Dr. Marlow looked instinctively round him for something which might serve as a weapon ; and happily the bat Harold had been mending lay ready to hand. Still dragging at its collar, with this the Doctor dealt the dog a furious blow. With no other result, however, than that of the brute tightening its cruel hold. Arthur had ceased his loud cries of fear and pain, and now lay stretched out senseless, the blood flowing copiously from his wounds.

"Nero ! Nero ! Let go, sir !" again shouted the Doctor ; and he dealt another blow which fearfully wounded the brute on its head. This repeated, disabled both its forepaws. Then it let go its hold, slowly retreated to a distant part of the room, and then crouched down as though preparing for another spring.

"Help me to lift him, Forbes," shouted the Doctor. "Let us all get out. Denis, open the door. Something must have been done to the dog, or it would not act thus. Make haste ! It may spring again."

Denis opened the door. Walter and Harold rushed out, while Forbes and the Doctor lifted the injured boy. The door shut safely after them, Arthur was carried into the kitchen as the readiest place, and there he was laid upon a table.

"He has fainted from fear and pain combined," said the Doctor ; "but consciousness is returning. A little brandy, Forbes, and a pair of scissors to rip open his jacket with. I must see at once what the injury is. I wouldn't for much this had happened."

"Nor I," replied Forbes, as she burst into tears. "What will Mrs. Hexham say? She is so fond of Arthur."

The housekeeper hurried away as she spoke, soon returning with what was required. The boy revived, a pillow was placed under his head, and his shoulder examined. It was greatly contused, and already much swollen, but the lacerations from the dog's fangs were not serious, although much blood was flowing. His hands were also fearfully rent and bitten, but happily no bones were crushed or cartilage severed through. The Doctor staunched the blood and called for hot water.

"This shoulder," he said, "must be well fomented. I will make a beginning, Forbes, and then you and Milly must continue it, while I write a note to Miss Haller, to explain the cause of my absence and ask for some medicine. Denis must mount Jack, and ride to and fro to the castle as quickly as he can."

By the time the note was written and the old servant gone, Arthur was restored to consciousness, and the fomentations so tenderly applied began to relieve him from the first intensity of pain. Then it was that the Doctor became aware that all the children were present, and watched with painful interest what was taking place. Freda was weeping bitterly, and Iole clinging to her, while Kathie, having dropped asleep, nestled in Harold's arms.

"These children must all go away; it must be their bedtime," spoke the Doctor. "They only disturb the poor boy. We must put him to bed. The anodyne Denis will presently bring back will throw him into a deep sleep. Where can he go? Not with Walter and Harold, certainly. He must have a room to himself, and I will remain with him till he is better."

"He can have Kathie's room," answered Forbes; "for the child has slept with Miss Freda since the mourvreen has

been away. The latter may, as you know, return at any hour ; but, even if she should, she will be no hindrance. Denis can stay up, and I can watch with you."

"No, it will not be necessary. If circumstances permit—and this I shall learn on Denis's return—I can remain here for a few hours. It will be best I should ; so please hasten and make the room ready."

So soon as they were gone, Freda and Iole—the former especially—began to plead earnestly to sit up with their brother. Walter also wished to do so ; but the Doctor negatived their desire, and assuring them that Arthur would be much better in the morning, bade Joyce, the maid who remained, see them upstairs. So, as soon as Forbes returned, Arthur was carried very tenderly to Kathie's room, and put to bed. Here the bathing of his shoulder and hands was continued ; and as soon as Denis was back with the medicine, a dose was administered, and he presently dropped asleep, though uneasiness soon returned, and he moaned and moved restlessly to and fro.

Dr. Marlow was more and more distressed, and Forbes and Milly were much concerned also.

"We had better, as soon as day breaks, send for Mrs. Hexham," spoke the housekeeper ; "it is bad enough for the boy to be thus mangled by a brute, but it will be worse still if he dies before she sees him."

"He will not die," replied the Doctor ; "although he may suffer from his shoulder for a time. I deplore the matter as much as you can do, and would have rather given away all I possess than it should have happened. The Ladies Clare will deplore it as much as I do. One thing is, however, certain—that the boys must have been trespassing somewhere about the castle ; and, now I recollect, there was great outcry and barking in the lower hall soon after midnight. Arthur may have got a key and ascended the Hundred Steps."

The same idea had already occurred to Forbes, for she was quite sure the boys had been away from the Grange through the previous night ; but she did not hint her suspicions, for that would be to turn tell-tale, and perhaps bring punishment on them. She answered, however, by saying with great firmness, "Whether the boys trespassed or not, such a thing *ought* not to have happened, Dr. Marlow. Children, you know, will be curious—especially when they think a secret exists and is hidden from them ; and Arthur, as you must have noticed, is a resolute and daring boy. But let children's faults be what they may, no one has a right to keep savage dogs to act like Nero. Mrs. Hexham will, I am sure, think as I do."

Dr. Marlow made no reply, but began bathing Arthur's shoulder with the liniment Denis had brought. This in a measure stilled the boy's great restlessness—though, on the other hand, his feverish symptoms increased. Dr. Marlow was seriously uneasy, and Forbes prayed for daylight.

As the night wore on, old Denis lay down on a sort of wide bench with a back, which occupied a snug place on one side of the great kitchen chimney : and so resting, fell asleep. He therefore did not hear, as dawn began to break, that the latch of the kitchen door was lifted from the outer side, and the door being then gently opened, some one entered and came towards him. It was old Norah—Kathie's nurse—and she looked travel-worn, famished, and ill. Without disturbing him, she crossed the kitchen, and ascending the back staircase, entered the room where Kathie usually slept, but which, to her surprise, was now occupied by the injured boy and those attending him. With great good feeling she began immediately, in her native tongue, to apologize for intruding ; and saying she had found the outer door, by which she usually entered, locked, she inquired, with much

concern, what was the matter. Dr. Marlow told her, and added he feared the boy was very ill.

"Don't take on," she replied, in her native Irish; "tell me how the motherless little one is—and I'll mend all the rest. Many a man I have seen hunted down in my day with dogs, and many a bite and a wound I have cured. There are herbs in the woods hard by that'll do it all. I couldn't cure the little one's fever—that was above my art—but this hurt I can."

Forbes assured old Norah that Kathie was well, and asleep in one of the young ladies' beds in an adjacent room. Thus assured, she returned to the kitchen, and arousing Denis, borrowed a lantern and went forth again into the grey mists of the dawn. Full an hour and a half elapsed before she returned, spent, bedraggled, and very wet—for she had been far into a bog as well as the woods; but she brought back with her several kinds of herbs and thick-leaved plants. With these she made a sort of mash in a kettle over the fire, and when it was sufficiently cool, she took it upstairs and spread it like a plaster over Arthur's shoulder, arm, and hands. The effect was soon perceptible. His restlessness grew gradually less, his pulse slackened, and his sleep deepened into most perfect repose.

"He will sleep now," she said in Irish, "many an hour, as peaceful as a lamb; and in a day or two the bruises will be gone, and the young gentleman himself again. But a fresh plaster must be put on every three hours—which the mistress and maid here, no doubt, will do. I must beg a drop and a bit, see the child, and then go: Quinlivan is in trouble, and has none but me to care for him."

"I may leave, then, for a time, Norah?" asked Dr. Marlow, who saw that Arthur was really better.

"The sun is rising now," she replied, "and he will sleep

till sunset. But the room must be darkened and kept very still, and the plasters changed as gently as possible."

"I and Milly will see that that is done," replied Forbes. "Our best care you need not fear. Dr. Marlow will, I know, be glad to leave for a time. So come downstairs and have food and drink. You look worn out and full of sorrow."

The old woman shook her head and sighed. "The child first," she said: "my heart hungers for her—for she's the light of my life. I nursed her father at my breast; and a pride he was to me till he wasted his substance and took to evil ways." All these words were uttered rapidly, in the Irish tongue; and Forbes, from having lived long in the country, gathered their meaning pretty well.

So she led old Norah to the room in which pretty Kathie lay in Freda's bed, buried in profound sleep. The old woman kissed her rapturously, but gently, again and again, and then followed Forbes downstairs. Here she partook of meat and drink, and then hurried away, as it was supposed, to the cave on the shore just as day was beginning to break.

The plaster of herbs was applied again and again to Arthur's shoulder, hands, and arm; and his sleep was for many hours profound. Then he woke wonderfully better, and asked for food; and when this was eaten he begged that all the children might come up and sit with him. This they were delighted to do—the girls especially; so clustering about his bed, where he sat propped up with pillows, their happiness was intense, and their chatter incessant. Arthur was as cheerful as the rest.

"Where's that dog now?" he asked. "A pretty pinch he gave me!"

"Yes!" replied Walter; "and Dr. Marlow, in turn, must have broken both his fore-paws with the force of the bat he

struck with, for the corner of the playroom to which Nero retreated is covered with blood. Early this morning he limped home, for a labourer mowing the orchard saw him go by. Denis says he is likely to be shot, and Forbes adds he ought to be. Innocent children are not to be torn to pieces like foxes or wolves."

"He ought not to be shot—he shall not be shot," said Arthur bravely; "we boys were in the wrong. We went creeping up the Hundred Steps, and he scented us. The poor brute has been taught to understand that every intruder upon the castle is an enemy, and that therefore it is its duty to hunt such down."

"Pat once told me," said Harold, "that when they want Nero to understand that any one is a friend who may enter the castle, his right fore-paw is put into that person's hand, and this must be done in a certain way and a certain part of the castle. This is done with all the servants, and then he perfectly understands."

"Well, he shan't be shot," spoke Arthur, resolutely. "I'll beg Mrs. Hexham to take us back to England rather than that."

"I say too, he shan't be shot," said Walter.

"But it was very cruel to tear Arthur as he did," spoke Freda feelingly; "as Forbes says, we haven't seen the end of the matter yet."

"Nonsense," interrupted Arthur; "you talk like a girl, Freda. I am much better, and in a few days I shall be able to move my shoulder and use my hands, I am sure. Nero shall not be shot."

The children, gathered about the bed, were thus talking, when Dr. Marlow, opening the door, came in so gently that he heard the last few sentences. He was relieved of a great sense of pain and responsibility by seeing that Arthur was so much better.

"I am glad to see you so cheerful," he said, addressing Arthur, "and able to have the children with you. I deeply deplore the dog's savage assault. So do Lady Mary and Lady Isabella Clare."

"It was my fault," replied the injured boy, looking bravely and brightly up into the Doctor's face. "I and Walter and Harold went where we ought not to have gone. Nero must therefore not be punished."

"One of the gamekeepers has been sent for, to shoot him to-morrow morning."

"He shall not be shot," replied the boy with great determination. "If he is, I will return to England, and so shall mamma, if my entreaties will not prevail; but they will, I know. When she hears of this, she will judge at once that I went somewhere on the dog's path, and so the fault is mine."

"It was very cruel of Nero to bite poor Arthur," interposed Freda, as tears filled her fine eyes; "but please don't let him be killed. We shall all be so sorry. We shall—we shall indeed! Please, Arthur, let us all send a letter to Lady Mary, begging her to spare the dog. Walter can write the letter, and we can all sign it; and you, Arthur, can put a cross. With your hand so injured, you will not write for many a day."

"O yes!" replied the Doctor; "in a week, let us hope, his hand will be well. Now all of you go downstairs; and if you wish to write this letter, get it done, and I will take it to the ladies. I want to examine Arthur's shoulder, and speak to Forbes."

So they went down to the schoolroom and began the letter at once. But they were, one and all, very puzzled as to the wording and manner of address to Lady Mary Clare. At length, after much blotting and crossing out, and altering in many ways, the letter and its signatures stood thus:—

"Lady Mary Clare, and Lady Isabella Clare.

"DEAR LADIES,—

"We do not wish Nero to be shot, so we hope you will send away the gamekeeper without doing the dog any harm. We are very sorry that poor Arthur was so badly bitten, but then he will soon be better, and we shall all be happy again. Arthur, Walter and Harold were in fault. They found an old key, and unlocking the gate, went up the Hundred Steps just to see them. Nero knew they had been there, and so was angry. He must be made to understand that he is not to hurt us, for we like him very much.

"We are your respectful children,

ARTHUR BETTON X (his mark). ETHELFREDA BETTON.

WALTER MARLOW.

IOLE BETTON.

HAROLD MARLOW.

LUCY MARLOW.

KATHLEEN QUINLIVAN X (her mark)."

This feat of letter-writing accomplished, they waited impatiently for their summons upstairs. When it came, they found Arthur still propped up with pillows, and able to say a few words to them, though fast growing drowsy from the anodyne just administered. The Doctor at once said that, having examined the wounds, he found them wonderfully healed. Indeed, old Norah's plaster of herbs had already wrought almost a cure, and in a few days he would be well.

"But to-morrow, as early as I can," he added, "I will ride over to the coastguardsmen's hut, and let Mrs. Hexham know all about this unlucky affair—for it is right she should. And I will come and see you again, Arthur, before I go, so as to take a last report. Now you must lie down, my boy ; there must be no more excitement for you to-night."

"Oh ! but please," spoke Freda, "here's the letter about Nero, and Arthur must put his mark."

“Well, let it be done at once.”

So they all crowded round the side of his bed, and while Walter held pretty Kathie in his arms—and she was delighted to be an eye-witness—Freda placed the pen between Arthur’s fingers, and held them and it while he made the necessary mark. Then they all kissed him very tenderly, and the Doctor and Forbes having drawn the bedclothes about his shoulders, left him to his rest.

Soon after the Doctor quitted the Grange, and took his way to the castle. On gaining a height in the wooded post-road leading thereto, he looked back, and heaving a sigh of relief, said audibly to himself,—

“Thank God! the boy is mending.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE SMUGGLERS' CAVE.

ON the morrow, as the lovely summer's day advanced, a gentleman rode down from the wooded uplands, which for some distance stretched away from Castle Morr to that wilder country of rock, ravine, and moor which bounded the ocean for many a mile. As he thus advanced towards the coast, the scenery became still more wild and stern in character; rocky headlands and vast masses of jagged pointed rocks, thrown and piled one upon the other in strange confusion, stretched far out to sea. At intervals, such portions as had been worn down to broken rugged flatness by the force of the elements through countless ages, formed causeways, piers, and passages. Over some of these the waves dashed, or forced a way through; the mightier masses receiving their full force, though only to hurl the water back again in never-ceasing clouds of spray and foam. The sight was sublimely grand, and grander because there lay beyond what appeared the illimitable sea.

The gentleman was accompanied by several dogs; and fastened before and behind his saddle were various baskets and parcels, the former containing the choicest fruits and flowers. The nearer he approached the coast, the more rugged the ground became, till at length it was with difficulty he made his way amid sharpened boulder stones and fissures. At length, again ascending, he came out into a comparatively

level, well-sheltered space of considerable extent, beautifully carpeted with the finest turf, and varied at intervals by clumps of arbutus shrubs, gorse, broom, and juniper, and by fragments of rock jutting out from the surface, in the clefts of which grew ferns and other plants. There were several springs which, uniting at length in a rocky channel, swept down towards the sea.

Here stood the coastguardsmen's hut, well set in the most sheltered nook of this very lonely, yet most charming glen. To the rider's surprise, two tents were pitched no great way from the hut, and full a dozen coastguardsmen were seen about. Some, perched away on crags and higher ground, were reconnoitring the coast either way with their glasses, while others lay about smoking and reading. A few were occupied in and about the tents preparing their dinner, and in cleaning and furbishing their accoutrements.

Dr. Marlow—for it was the physician from Castle Morrknew all the coastguardsmen well. The first he approached, hearing the horse's hoofs, rose from the ground, and made, with much show of respect, his military salute.

"Good day, Benwell," said the Doctor. "I am surprised to see a body of you here: I thought the coast was pretty quiet."

"So quiet, Dr. Marlow," was the reply, "that Quinlivan's people have been able to bring to shore the contraband cargoes of two Spanish vessels. Their crews ran them into a cove safely, and Quinlivan's men cleared off the goods into the hills in a single night. So we are now after them, as also keeping watch for some other vessels likely to come in."

"It takes daring men to do all this," was the reply.

"Yes; but we hope to be down upon them presently, and Quinlivan too."

Dr. Marlow was, however, much more interested in the business which had brought him there, than in the doings of

a band of clever smugglers and their lawless chief; so he inquired after Mrs. Hexham, and as to where she was.

"The lady, sir, is away sketching on some rocks above the 'Devil's Net.' Her dog and the boy Pat are with her, as also one or two of our men for a safeguard. Some of Biddy O'Grady's crew have been stealing a few of her drawing things, and prowling about the hut to snatch anything else they can. So Captain Fairholt, who was round here inspecting the day before yesterday, thought it best she should not go to the shore alone; and though the rest may be called away at any moment, two men at least are to remain, with their tents, so long as the lady stays."

"Very right, and very thoughtful of Captain Fairholt. I must thank him when next we meet. Now, in what direction must I go to see Mrs. Hexham—as I have little time to lose, and my business is of importance?"

"The place is some short distance from here, and very difficult to get access to," replied Benwell; "but I'll guide you, sir. Please ride to the hut and dismount, and one of the men will take your horse. You cannot ride to where the lady is, for it is dangerous and rocky in the extreme. We carry her there and bring her back."

The Doctor therefore rode to the hut, and dismounting, went within, Benwell following with the baskets and parcels. Here was a good commodious room, the bed and washing and toilet apparatus sent from the Grange standing in a recess, and in the midst a table and some chairs and stools. Without losing a moment, the Doctor and his guide made towards the rugged shore, the difficulties of the way increasing as they proceeded. They had to climb detached fragments of rock, to leap others, to make their way over perilous and rugged stepping-stones, round which the scum of the spent surf eddied; and more frequently, as they advanced towards the sea, they had to step from column to column of

a causeway, similar to, though somewhat smaller than, the Giant's Causeway, on the northern shore of Ireland. Deep water lay around these shafts of basalt, thus making the passage from one to the other most perilous, as, in case of a slip, rescue was almost impossible.

On a point lying near the "Devil's Net," and where several columns meeting at the top formed a sort of platform, Dr. Marlow found Mrs. Hexham busy at her work, Lufra asleep on a shawl at her feet, and Pat hard by making a net for his grandfather, and learning at the same time a spelling lesson ; for Mrs. Hexham was kindly teaching him to read. She sat on a flattened stone the men had brought for her ; and for security a rope was fastened round her waist, and this to a rock no great way off. The view of the "Devil's Net" from this point was grand in the extreme ; and though she had made several other sketches of the scene, not one could be compared to this, on account of the height from which it was taken, and the power this gave her of comprising in a glance the whole wonderful combination of rock and water.

Seeing Dr. Marlow, Mrs. Hexham rose hurriedly, and fearing from this unexpected visit that something was amiss, greeted him, and then anxiously inquired for the children.

"They are all well. But Arthur has had an accident. It is about this I am come to tell you."

"Oh dear, dear ! My boy, my dear boy ! my heart is wrapped up in him. My boy !" She stood up trembling and terror-stricken, and grew as pale as death.

"My dear lady," the Doctor replied earnestly, "there is no cause for this pain. Arthur will live long to love you in turn. He is better already ; but I thought it best to let you know. He and the other boys got a key and climbed up the Hundred Steps. Nero tracked their footsteps, and, recognizing those of Arthur, flew at him and bit his hands and shoulder badly. But no bone, cartilage, or nerve is hurt, and

he is already much better. Old Norah chanced to come to the Grange, and, hearing of the accident, applied a herb plaster, which has done much good already. There is, I very earnestly assure you, no cause for alarm."

"Is there not? Dog bites are so often fatal! My dear Arthur! I must go at once."

"Nero's bite will not kill him. He was in a deep tranquil sleep when I left the Grange at ten o'clock. I have come to fetch you; but there is, I assure you, no cause for alarm."

"But the dog may attack him again,—may injure the other children. Thus I cannot stay at Morr; my duty to them is above all other things."

"Hear particulars, and then you will judge better. But please step aside with me a moment: on that point there we can speak more freely."

Dr. Marlow went forward, leading the way, and they stood presently together on the edge of the platform of columns—two or three, higher than the rest, forming a sort of screen, and the mighty waves dashing at their base far below, covered by a monotonous, though harmonious roar, their spoken words. They could just hear each other speak—that was all. No eavesdropper could listen, even had there been one by.

After listening for some time, Mrs. Hexham said,—

"But I shall always be in terror lest the dog should again attack Arthur. Is there no way in which the animal could be taught that the boy is a friend?"

"Only one; and——"

He stopped and looked at Mrs. Hexham fixedly, and then away over the great ocean before them. He then earnestly renewed his conversation, questioning her from time to time as he spoke. Listening with absorbed attention, she replied in wondering and fervent words. Not this only, but she uplifted her face and put her hands together, as though in

ratification of what she said. Still he went on talking more and more earnestly ; till, when he ended and they turned to go, she bent her head and passed her hand across her eyes, for they were dim with tears.

The sketches and painting materials were at once gathered up, and Benwell and two other coastguardsmen carrying the lady and assisting the physician, they retraced their difficult and dangerous way to the hut. Staying here no longer than to take some slight refreshment, Mrs. Hexham mounted her pony and the Doctor his horse, and they rode towards the Grange at Morr. The Doctor had brought Mrs. Hexham letters, but she stowed them away in her saddle pocket. Her thoughts were with Arthur. To see him, and be assured of his safety, overmastered every other desire and feeling.

Benwell, who knew every inch of this wild and lonely country, led the way by a shorter road than that Dr. Marlow had pursued, so that by six o'clock the Grange came in sight. Jumping down from the saddle, Mrs. Hexham went indoors. She heard the children's voices in the dining-room ; she hurried in. They were all gathered about the tea-table, at which Forbes presided. She saw Arthur : he was propped up in an easy chair.

- But she saw no more than this, for she staggered and nearly fainted, and, but for Milly's arm, would have fallen to the floor.

They placed her on a couch, and she soon recovered consciousness ; nothing aiding her more than to hear Arthur's dear voice beside her, and to feel his loving kisses on her face.

" Dear, dear Edith ! I am really much better this evening Forbes will tell you so. I shall be jolly well in a day or two, and ready for the island and housebuilding."

She clung to him and wept bitterly. The terror that he might yet die from these cruel bites overmastered her still.

"I think, my dear boy—my Arthur—we must leave Morr. My terror lest Nero should attack you again, or else the other children, will rob me of all comfort."

"You talk nonsense," said the Doctor in his peremptory and stern way. "You shall not leave Morr. Where else would you or the children find a happier home or more appreciating friends? I will take care about the dog; I have assured you so over and over again."

"Please, mamma," entreated Freda, "don't say a word about leaving Morr. We are all so happy." The other children entreated the same.

"I shall be all right, dear Edith, in a few days," spoke Arthur, gaily and bravely. "So say no more: the fault was mine."

The children crowded about her, each one comforting and entreating her. At length, feeling better, Mrs. Hexham took off her hat and riding-skirt, and the children resumed their tea. But before the former would sit down or take refreshment, she would see Arthur's hands—which, though still showing the bites and lacerations Nero had inflicted, with swelling and discolouration yet remaining, were greatly better. Of course she was very sorry, and great apprehension lay at her heart; but she wisely hid her fear and strove for cheerfulness.

She sat down to tea with the children, and Doctor Marlow took his leave. When the meal was ended Mrs. Hexham went aside with Forbes for a time, and then accompanied the children to the lawn. Here, till it was bedtime, she deeply interested them with an account of the coastguardsmen's hut, and the wild scenes she had been painting. She told them how respectful and attentive the men had been; and that but for their assistance she could have neither remained at the hut, nor climbed the fearful precipices necessary to her work.

"Biddy O'Grady's children," she said, "are always prowling about the hut. There are seven or eight of them,—some great boys and girls of fifteen, sixteen, and even more ; and occasionally others, as naked and barbarous, accompany them. They are always begging, and, if you do not give, they steal. Sometimes they come with waifs and strays from the shore and offer them for sale ; and I have bought a few for your museum, which I hope you will care for when the long evenings come."

"Oh ! we will !" they all said in a breath. And then they questioned her eagerly.

"Well, among the things I have bought for you are some very beautiful, and, I think, very rare fossils. These the elder boys brought from two or three celebrated caves a long way up the shore. There are coins and fragments of pottery, and many other things I cannot now remember. The next time Mike returns from bringing over the letters and provisions, you shall have them."

They expressed their pleasure, and then questioned her further about these lawless vagrants.

"Two or three of them," she replied, "are always prowling about the 'Devil's Net.' The day before yesterday two of them climbed the mass of joined columns on which I sit, and, while my back was turned, stole my compasses, two pencils, and a brush. The last I could not possibly spare, as it was the only one of the kind I had, and it would take a week at least to obtain another from England. So in the evening I went with Benwell and another man to find the mother. After crossing a track of hilly, broken country, and making way through a considerable stretch of difficult bog, we came to a wretched, half-dismantled cabin ; outside of this five or six great boys and girls were idling ; and the first, as soon as they saw us, began to throw stones and lumps of peat. In order to frighten them, Benwell drew out his cutlass and ran

them into the hut, where Biddy O'Grady and three smaller children sat about a turf fire. As I followed the men, she rose, and then I saw that she was nearly naked, for her feet and legs were bare, and her only apparel was an old ragged frieze petticoat, and a fragment about her shoulders of what apparently had once been a rich India shawl. Her hair was a tangled mass almost impossible to describe, and the children about her were all but naked.

"She understands a little English, though she can speak but a few words of it; so Benwell told her of the bigger children's thefts, and threatened, if she did not make them return my brush, he would send for the priest and the police. This frightened her; so, after parleying some time with the bigger boys in her own tongue, she promised, if it could be found to bring up what was missing to the coastguardsmen's hut, while she added 'her childer were blissid crathurs, wid no harm in 'im, but innocent play—the fatherless things!' Then she began to whine and beg, and tell the most dolorous tales, though even Benwell could only partially understand what she said. Next day, before I started to the rocks, she brought the brush back, and I rewarded her with some tea and sugar, and a trifle in money. Since then, not a day passes but she is up at the hut begging; and I do not forbid her, because I think, if I could gain a degree of influence over her, I might induce her to remove to Islandmore—the village nearest Morr, where the agent of the Ladies Clare lives, and where also there is a good school. In this case, some civilizing influences might be brought to bear on her and her children.

"One would think," said Freda, "she would be glad to have them taught, so that they might know how to behave better and to earn money by work."

"No; as yet they are such savages as to like idleness, and what they consider to be freedom, better than all else which

can be offered to them. They are wholly unconscious that their ignorance and idleness make them in all respects the most wretched of slaves. Biddy O'Grady, and several other families like her own, have been removed more than once to Islandmore. But so soon as winter comes, and wrecks are likely to take place, they flee again to starvation and their miserable cabins in the bogs."

The children were much interested. Mrs. Hexham went on to tell them that there were many such miserable habitations scattered along the coast of Ireland,—some standing alone, like Biddy O'Grady's hut, and others in clusters; but that the nobleman who would succeed at their death to the property of the Ladies Clare intended to take further steps for civilizing the savages of the district.

When the children's curiosity had been thus satisfied, Mrs. Hexham told them of the various sketches she had made, and how she meant to go on with the work so long as the fine weather lasted. She added she must leave them again the day after the morrow, and might be yet some weeks away. They were all very sorry to hear this; but she consoled them with the promise of several days' holiday at the hut before she left off sketching, and this as soon as Arthur's shoulder was quite well. She then said they must go to bed, for she had letters to read and write and other things to attend to.

The hour was earlier than usual, but Edith had a grave way of expressing a desire, and the children had learnt to obey and respect it; so when she had read prayers they cheerfully departed. An hour after, while Freda yet lay awake, she was surprised to hear a carriage enter the courtyard and stay before the porch. Some one alighted, and entering the hall, passed into the room below. Conversation followed, though in a subdued tone; yet every now and then, a word being uttered somewhat louder than the rest, she

knew that the visitor was Miss Haller ; but, as that lady came probably with some message from the Ladies Clare, Freda ceased to wonder, and soon fell asleep.

On the morrow Arthur felt still stronger and better ; and so, as soon as breakfast was over, Mrs. Hexham proposed to him and the rest that they should all go to the southern shore. The morning was lovely, she said : the air would do Arthur good ; and the other boys could draw Kathie in her little carriage. She herself could not go, as she had business to attend to. So they departed, taking some luncheon with them ; Arthur being under strict injunctions to walk quietly and not to use or hurt his arm.

They had gone about a mile along the shore, the sun shining down in glory on the crisp sands, and the waves sweeping in with harmonious monotony of sound, when Kathie discovered she had not brought her favourite doll. She began to cry, and not even Arthur could console her. So Freda proposed to run back for it, and, promising not to be long, returned at once. When she reached the Grange, the hall door, as usual on these lovely mornings, stood open. She therefore ran into the playroom to find the doll, but it was not there. Then she knew it was in a drawer in the room where Kathie slept ; so, going upstairs, she sought and found it. As she returned and passed by Mrs. Hexham's bedroom door, it stood open, as did also that of her dressing-room. Within the latter, but with their backs turned towards her, stood that lady and Forbes—the former attired in a rich black silk dress, the skirt of which the housekeeper was adjusting. Mrs. Hexham's hair was also freshly dressed, and her toilet was finished by the neatest collar and cuffs. Freda was much surprised. This dress she knew had never been worn before, for her mamma had had it made just before she left London. It was her best dress, and one she had bought with some money derived from the sale of a

picture to Dr. Granville. Her mamma looked so very young and charming as she thus stood there, that Freda's first impulse was to run in and kiss her. But in another moment she felt she must not do so, or even make her presence known. She had been dismissed with the rest, and her hasty return in this way would look as if she suspected something and wanted to find it out. She had therefore the good taste and delicacy to creep down the staircase with silent steps, and so along the hall and courtyard, till she gained the springy turf and the shadows of the arbutus shrubs.

Freda came up with the little company before it reached the cave. As they neared it they saw several coastguardsmen passing to and fro, and busy around it : some here and there clearing away the sand with spades, others hunting about the fissures of the rocks or passing to and fro into various caves. The men knew the children lived at the Grange, so they were not only very respectful in their manners, but talked to them.

Those who were turning over the sand stopped suddenly. They had shovelled away the lighter sand which the waves of the two last tides had swept in, and thus exposed that which was much harder. On this, plainly visible, were ripple marks, and still more distinctly those made by the inward rolling of small kegs or barrels, as also others arising from the kegs having been occasionally set on end.

"Here are the marks, sir," said the men to another at a little distance, who, from his naval uniform and more handsomely decorated cutlass-case and pistols, was a superior officer ; "and therefore we may be sure the cargoes were landed here."

The officer stepped forward and looked, and then bade the men clear the sand further away. They obeyed ; and for many yards to right and left were the same unmistakable signs.

"I am glad of this," said the officer tersely; "this makes our point for Thursday night certain. There are so many caves about here, that to fix upon the right one is a great matter."

"I think if you will go within, sir," said another of the men, "you will have stronger evidence still. Barton came upon a clue just now, and is following it up."

"Better shovel back the sand, and follow me," and the officer, turning, went slowly towards the cave.

Kathie began to cry and cleave to Freda. "Let me go there," she said. "The mourvreen, and Shavy, and Mike, and perhaps papa——"

"No, dear," replied Freda; "the mourvreen is not there, nor Shavy either. The mourvreen told Denis she was living away in the hills just now."

"I know," said Kathie; "they have very big tubs there, and a big, big fire; and something runs pretty and clear into the big tubs. Blaze does that, and Dan, and many more."

"Hush!" said Arthur. "Freda, if the child prates thus, they will find out that she belongs to Quinlivan—the man they are after, I am sure; and then there'll be a pretty to-do. Dr. Grimwig will never forgive us. Let Harold help you to go further on, while Walter and I follow the men."

Kathie began to cry louder. "I must go to the mourvreen; I will go!"

"Hush!" said Arthur angrily, "or those men with great beards and pistols will carry you off. Keep in the carriage, and Harold will draw you on a little way; and if you'll be good, I will fetch you and take you into the cave, if the men go." And so saying, he bade Harold and the girls go on. He and Walter then followed the men.

Several of them had been hunting about the passages of the cave with their lanterns; and, guided by the signs of several well-worn pathways, had come to the wall of sheer

hard rock, in which was the doorway opening inwards. This they soon discovered, by the hollow resounding noise which followed the taps they made with a heavy stone ; and, then looking more closely, they saw the line marking out the door. Prising this with their cutlasses, they presently opened it, and saw the passage before them, as also the steps leading into the large cave. This stood open, for the heavy pieces of timber used as a barricade lay thrown back upon the floor. Within, the cave was empty, as also the others leading therefrom. Every keg and box and bale was gone—as also all signs of human occupation. Nothing could be more drear and lonely than these places.

“Quinlivan’s den at last !” exclaimed the chief coast-guardsmen, as he looked around him. “And hiding holes enough and to spare. The flitting has been recent too : fresh ashes on the hearth there, and here new signs of keg and box. He may know that the hunt is too keen for the place to be used further for habitation ; but, none the less, it may serve as a storehouse for goods. So, if all be well, we’ll be down upon him one night the week after next, and when he least expects us.”

“But we must close up the entrance, governor, and leave everything as we found it, or our birds will be scared,” remarked one of the men.

“True ! The chief bird is worth capture ; and my information is, I think, correct. The Spanish vessel will be off the coast about the date I expect.”

“There must be an outlet somewhere, and that leading to the moors above,” said presently another of the men, “for there are no signs of the cargo going out, though there are many of its coming in.”

But the men searched every passage in vain ; they climbed over rugged walls, and from thence on to precipices beyond, and by aid of their lanterns they peered into yawning

chasms, and saw and heard wide strips of glassy water plunging headlong over rocks into unfathomable depths below. Even they, so much accustomed to the awful presence of Nature in her most secret and lonely recesses, shuddered as they gazed. But they sought in vain for full an hour : no exit to the wild and solitary moors above could they find, although fully persuaded that one existed.

The men, as their hunt grew, had looked so fierce and stern, that the two elder boys thought it not prudent to follow them too closely—though keeping within sufficient reach to hear much they said, and withdrawing, as they withdrew, on their return. Thus they saw the aperture leading into the passage closed, and stood without on the shore, when the men, at the word of command, marched off towards the post-road leading by the Grange, and thence to their head-quarters in Islandmore.

The boys watched them safely out of sight, and then ran back into the cave. The light to guide them was dim, yet by dint of running their fingers over the rocky wall, they felt the fissure round the door, and this not being fastened from within, they easily opened with their pocket-knives. This effected, they had more light, and could see their way up the steps into the great cave.

"Let us fetch Kathie," said Arthur : "we want a light, and she may tell us where matches and candles are hidden." So, retracing their steps, they fetched the children, who were waiting not far off.

"Kathie has been crying very much," said Lucy ; "she wants to go into the cave, because she thinks the mourvreen is there."

"We are going," replied Arthur and Walter together ; and with this they drew the little carriage as fast as they could up to and into the mouth of the cave. Then Walter carried her in, and the rest followed.

Kathie began to cry again when she missed the firelight and faces to which she had been accustomed. But Freda comforted her and told her the mourvreen was only gone away into the hills, and would come again.

"If I had a light," said Arthur, "I would see if she had left her little child anything. Kathie, where did the mourvreen keep the candles and the turf?" He repeated the question several times before she understood him, and then it was only by simplifying his language to the uttermost. At length he elicited that the candles and turf were behind the door. But there were several doors, and the difficulty grew. Presently, however, behind one less dimly lighted than the rest—for a glimmer of the shining day abroad broke through a far-up fissure in the rocks overhead—he noticed a wide plank reared lengthwise along the wall. Walter, moving this, saw an apparently wide recess; and luckily, far within at the rear, he found abundance of turf, wood, candles, and an old battered iron candlestick and matches. On finding these, the boys shouted with joy. They lighted a candle, carried turf into the cave, and made a bright fire; and thus, with light and warmth, they were all, with the exception of Kathie, very soon as merry as could be.

"This is as nice as the island," said Harold; "I hope we shall often come here."

"No, nothing comes up to the island," replied Arthur. "As soon as my arm is well enough, we will set to work again."

"Yes, that we will!" added Walter; "nothing is like the island."

"But we can come here in winter," said Harold. "Mike says the shore way to the lakes is often impassable in winter, owing to the fury of the sea and the long way the waves sweep inland. We can come here then and light a fire, and do just what we like."

"That is if Dr. Marlow and mamma will let us," remarked Freda.

"Oh, you girls are always thinking of the proprieties," replied Walter. "Dr. Grimwig has nothing to do with us in our play-hours."

"This point we can discuss another time," said Arthur. "Let us look about us, climb where we can, and hunt out surprises. See here, Walter,"—and when he had drawn the latter a little away from the rest, he whispered, "I want to find that telescope, if I can, but I do not want the girls to know. Freda tells mamma everything, and calls it 'keeping conscience.'"

"Yes, let us look for the telescope," said Walter; "we will borrow it, and bring it back again."

This being their purpose, they returned to the girls, and bade them sit by the fire till they returned. "They were going to climb up places," they said, "where girls could not go."

"Please mind your arm, Arthur," entreated Freda. "You are so venturesome; and mamma, you know, will blame me if you hurt it further."

Arthur stooped and kissed her tenderly. "No, I promise you I won't climb much to-day. That treat shall come off another time. I won't be gone ten minutes. Walter and I only want to look for something we saw the night we came here with Edith and Dr. Grimwig to see Kathie."

And to avoid further questioning the boys ran off. But they searched in vain for the telescope: the shelf on which they had seen it was empty. Much disappointed, they went back into the cave.

Freda was watching for their return; Kathie was seated on her lap, and Harold, Lucy, and Iole beside her.

"Arthur and Walter," she said, addressing them both, "Kathie keeps pointing to the wall here, and saying 'Papa,

and Blaise, and the mourvreen, and Shavy.' What can she mean?"

Arthur stooped and questioned the child, but the only answer he could elicit was "Come, come," or "Go, go."

"Perhaps it is some hiding-place," he said: "who knows?" So saying, he went and stood beside the rocky wall, up which the smoke curled towards a fissure in the lofty, cathedral-like roof. Then he saw that behind the smoke the wall for a certain distance was very rugged, standing out for some height in jagged masses. These he presently saw—in spite of the peat-soot—were artificial, being joined together with coarse mortar.

"Kathie," he called, as he peered from out the smoke, "what is it? Tell Arthur, and you shall have 'Mother Hubbard' to-night."

"The mourvreen, Blaise, Shavy," replied the child.

"How?"

The child held out her hands and pressed them a little forward. Arthur imitated her action with greater force, and as he did so a portion of the mass slid away for a space to the further side of the smoke, and revealed a stout door. Opening this he saw a passage, from which, at a short distance, led a steep flight of narrow stairs, cut in the natural rock. These seemed to lead far up, and probably towards some fall of water—for the roar that instantly filled the cave was tremendous. At once he and Walter ran up the steps, to see what they could see—for they were not in total darkness, and as they ascended the light grew. Round and round they wound, just as they might do up the highest tower of some very lofty castle; the steps apparently never ending. Yet they ended presently, for they brought the boys on to a narrow, rocky platform, divided from one opposite by a chasm some twelve feet wide, into which descended with powerful spring a green and glassy-looking

sheet of water. Its force and roar were alike tremendous, and these increased as the water entered the chasm ; for there, meeting with the resistance of jagged rocks, it was cast back again in clouds and jets of foam that almost touched the platform. The boys shuddered, and stood aghast with awe.

As their vision grew accustomed to the cloud of mingled mist and spray, they could see that both platforms were much longer than they were wide. Advancing to the end of that on which they stood, and beyond the fall of water, they saw that the chasm was probably crossed here, for a ledge, less than a foot in width, ran round the jutting side-wall ; but it was an awful-looking path, rugged and slime-covered, tortuous and dark from the sweep of water just beyond it, while below lay the chasm, in apparently unfathomable depth.

"What an awful place!" said Arthur, though with difficulty making himself heard. "I should think Quinlivan can never bring his kegs this way."

"Perhaps there is some other means of crossing this place : who knows?" replied Walter. "A movable plank, or something of that sort. One of the coastguardsmen told me these smugglers are such cunning fellows. Let us try and cross it. I'll go first, because of your arm."

Not waiting for a reply, Walter jumped on to the ledge and began his perilous feat, steadying himself by sliding his hand along the oozy wall. He crossed in safety ; and Arthur, not behind in showing pluck and daring, followed. But his steps were less steady, owing to his disabled arm ; and midway, where the slipperiness was very great, he stumbled, and with difficulty regained his balance. Then for a moment he paused, as though unable to go backwards or forwards. Seeing his great peril, Walter leapt back on to the ledge, seized Arthur's hand, and shouted to him to

leap. This he did, and in another instant was safe. Then they stood breathless, for their fright was great.

"You've saved me, Walter," said Arthur. "I thought for the minute I was gone."

"I thought so too," replied Walter: "I'm all of a tremble yet. But never mind,—we may find some other way to get back again. Let us look about. It's lighter this side."

As soon as this fright was over they did so, and saw, reared up near where they had crossed, two planks soddened and blackened by the never-ceasing showers of spray which fell upon them. Walter put his arms about one, and found he could easily lift it.

"I suppose one or both of these make the smugglers' bridge. Let me try." So saying, he dragged the plank to beyond the sweep of water and tried to throw it across. But it was a very dangerous feat indeed, and not accomplished without great peril, for the edge of the chasm was slippery with foam and the moistened soil which fell through the fissures of the rocky roof far above.

"Let me help you,"—and Arthur lent the aid of his left arm. Thus between them they threw the one plank across, then the other. Thus a bridge was formed, and they easily crossed it to and fro.

"How jolly," they said in a breath, "to have found this out! We may be sure this is the smugglers' bridge, and by its means they carry their kegs and bundles across."

"Yes; we may be sure of that," continued Arthur. "Now let us go on, and see what lies beyond."

On this further side of the waterfall they found another passage; and at the end of it the steps in the rock commenced anew, and wound far up, by many spirals, to a rocky platform, the roof of which, as they could see by the light falling through many chinks and crevices, was, at the height of an ordinary man, formed by a thin slab of stone.

There were a couple of large notches cut in the rock to climb up by to open it, and this Walter did easily. The slab when lifted fell back, and both boys, hurrying up eagerly, found themselves amid a pretty wide maze of furze, juniper, and such other bushes as grow wild on moors facing the sea. Thin threads of pathways, many and devious, crossed this maze in all directions, and the entrance to the cavern was further protected from all chance of discovery by the fact that a thin layer of turf, almost as green as that on the waste around, had been laid down and made to grow upon the slab which formed the trap-door.

Again on their feet, the boys looked around them. On the one hand nothing could be seen but a vast extent of lonely moors, varied, and in the far distance backed by lofty hills, and on the other the mighty ocean.

"It cannot be so very far from Morr," said Walter; "and yet I think we shall never find this place again. For there are so many of these bush-mazes, and one is so like another."

"For one thing, we can take the bearings of the coast and hills," replied Arthur; "and for another, I will stand here while you run out to the narrowest part of the maze just there, and tie my pocket-handkerchief to that thorn. You can put it low so as not to attract passers-by, though we shall see it."

Walter obeyed; and then, there being no further time to lose, for they had been away from the cave some time, they returned through the trap-door, closed it carefully, went down the steps, crossed the perilous bridge, and so down the other spiral windings towards the cave. Here, as they descended, they observed—what had previously escaped their attention—several recesses on either side the steps. Some contained turf and wood, others kegs and packages of various kinds; and close upon the cave was one smaller and more like a closet, for it was lined with shelves all round. The

light was scant, yet sufficient to let them see that there were strings of candles suspended on hooks, and, on various shelves around, matches, lanterns, bottles filled and unfilled, seamen's biscuits, cutlasses, and articles of bedding. And reared in one corner they perceived, to their great content, the telescope they so much wished to borrow.

"Shall we take it now?" whispered Arthur eagerly. "I mean, borrow it."

"We had better not," said Walter. "If we do, Freda or Lucy will be sure to tell Mrs. Hexham."

"Yes; that's certain. Well, never mind: it will be easy to come again."

"So it will. You heard what the men said about the week after next, and we can keep a look-out. Mrs. Hexham will be away; perhaps old Grimwig also. The coastguard are to be on Quinlivan's track—don't you recollect?"

"Now I do. If we watch we shall be sure to see the men. But come on: I hear Freda calling us. Come on!"

So the two adventurous lads passed through the door, closed it, and went round the cheery fire to push into its place the concealing rockwork.

"What a time you have been, boys!" said Freda, angrily. "Poor little Kathie would make me nurse her, and so fell asleep, as you see. If I had been free I should have gone after you. Harold went a little way through the door, but he was too much frightened to go far. Now tell me, what have you been doing, and what have you seen?" These questions showed that Freda was very curious.

"Girls ought to wait for boys," replied Arthur, in a sharp, short voice—for he considered that his sister had no right to lecture him. "And we couldn't come back sooner."

"I do not lecture, Arthur," replied Freda sweetly, yet firmly; "but you know, as well as I do, that mamma is punctual herself, and therefore expects us children to be

punctual too, and that it is disrespectful of us to keep dinner waiting."

"Don't talk nonsense. We are boys, and not humdrum clocks to keep time to a minute." Then, with a very self-sufficient air, which the other children thought great fun, he pulled out his watch. "It is a quarter-past twelve," he said; "and we shall be home by one; so don't play at the game of 'mamma,' Freda, any more, but come along."

Freda good-temperedly obeyed, and when they had settled all as they had found it, they went out of the cave into the passage and closed the concealing slab of rock behind them. They then placed Kathie softly in her little carriage and went on quickly towards the Grange.

When Arthur's good-temper had returned, Freda ran beside him, and begged him to tell her what he and Walter had seen. The other children, running also, begged too.

"No, I won't," he replied, "and I hope Walter won't. You girls are such sillies, you must tell mamma everything, and then every bit of fun is spoiled."

"When it is a matter for conscience I tell her, and shall always tell her," replied Freda, with great dignity for so young a girl; "but, as you well know, Arthur, I am no tale-bearer. I never told a tale of you, or any one, in my life." Then, quite hurt that Arthur should have even suggested that she was a tattler and mischief-maker, she went onwards quietly by herself. This tacit reproof as to his unmannerliness touched Arthur more than words; so, running forward, he put his left arm about her neck and kissed her tenderly.

"Don't mind me, Freda. Boys are not always soft and kind, like girls. If you'll listen I will tell you, and I am sure you'll wonder."

Freda loved the wilful lad too well for an angry shadow to linger for a moment between them, so she looked round

lovingly, and sweetly kissed him in turn. Then they went on-together, the others following in close company.

He told them about the steps and the platform, the waterfall, the bridge, the steps beyond, the rocky, turf-covered trap-door, and the wild moorland, with its dense environment of bushes around it, outside.

"What a wonderful place!" they all exclaimed in a breath—"what a wonderful place! How we shall like to see it! Arthur, when can we go?"

"Well, as soon as my arm is quite well," was the reply—for both Arthur and Walter wanted to make sure of the telescope before the girls accompanied them—"because, you see, there being three girls, you'll want so much helping. And we must take you in by way of the moor, for it will never do for you to scramble over those slippery planks across the waterfall."

"About the waterfall we must say nothing to mamma," replied Freda; "or she and Dr. Marlow will have no rest. But I think we ought to tell her about the cave."

"Oh, wait a bit!" spoke all the boys in a breath. "Girls are always in such a hurry about everything. Wait a bit, till you have seen the place, then you can describe it better."

"Yes, I will," replied Freda; "though I am pretty sure, Arthur and Walter, you'll never find the exact spot on the moor again—for, as you well know, one great clump of furze, juniper and arbutus, is so like another. For this reason we have so often lost ourselves, especially when the bushes are high and dense."

"I thought of that," spoke Arthur; "and so tied my handkerchief to a bush, and also took the bearings of the place, both as to the hills and the shore. I shall be sure to find it again when we want. Now, don't speak another word about the cave, or the maids or old Denis will overhear through some of the windows what we say."

As he spoke thus, Arthur pushed open the gate into the courtyard and led the way in. They were all very glad Kathie still slept, for she was such a chatterer ; so they lifted her carefully out of her pretty carriage and carried her into the playroom. There they laid her on the couch, and the girls, liking to play the part of mother, covered her up very tenderly and left her to her rest.

Dinner was ready by the time they had all washed their hands and faces and brushed their hair. Mrs. Hexham came in from her studio, kissed them, said grace, and they all sat down. To Freda's surprise, she was again in her customary dinner-dress. The beautiful silk one was off and probably put by, and not a sign of her charming toilette remained. As Freda had seen this unknowingly to the wearer, she was too well taught to say a word thereon ; for, though sweetly kind to them, Mrs. Hexham never permitted anything like intrusiveness. Freda, however, observed that her mamma was unusually silent and self-absorbed, and though they talked to her all dinner-time about the cave, she listened with much less interest than was her custom. The only sign, however, to them of her having had some communication with the castle during their absence, was the remark she made, as soon as dinner was over, that, after an hour's rest, they must all study their German and French lessons, and the girls practise their music, for that Miss Haller would be there at about six o'clock. They obeyed cheerfully and to the letter, and said and played their lessons so well as to win great praise from their admirable mistress.

Before they went to bed Mrs. Hexham told them that she was going away early on the morrow to resume her sketches on the northern shore ; and she bade them be diligent and steady during her absence—for if they were, and Dr. Marlow reported well of them, they should all come and spend a

few days at the coastguardsmen's hut. The renewal of this promise delighted them all extremely.

"Mamma," said Freda presently, "might we not ride some little way with you to-morrow? It is some days since we went out on our ponies."

"No!" replied Edith decidedly; "I have arranged otherwise. Dr. Marlow is going with me a part of the way, and Benwell, Mike and Pat the rest. You are going with Denis to Islandmore, to order one of Lady Mary's carpenters to go over to the isle as soon as work is resumed there; and you are to start a little earlier than I do, so as to ensure your return in time for dinner. The ponies will be at the door by nine o'clock, and Kathie is to ride on a pad in front of Denis; so we must all be up betimes."

No more was said, and the children retired to rest. Next morning they were astir early, and had had a run down to the shore before breakfast. After it they went out to see the ponies, which they found by the porch, pawing the flags prettily with their tiny hoofs, as though impatient to be off to the hills—which they really were. The children soon dressed and mounted, Forbes brought them a basket full of nice luncheon, and, when they had renewed their promises of care and obedience, they bade Mrs. Hexham a tender farewell and departed.

The elder children put their ponies into a canter, and soon were some way ahead. Denis had already told them they must keep to the right, and now he shouted after them.

"Not too much to the left, little gintlemin! To the right—to the right!" And he put old Jack into a trot, in order to follow them.

"The old stupid!" said Arthur. "Islandmore is in the direction of the castle, and consequently to the left, as he very well knows."

"I think there is more in this than we suspect," replied Walter. "Let us keep to the right as he bids, and when we get hidden by the trees we can diverge as much as we please. Come on!—he cannot ride very quickly, on account of Kathie and Lucy. Come on, come on!" And so they rode away as quickly as they could, old Denis calling out in vain, but presently content when he saw their ponies bearing well away to the right.

"The playful crathurs!" he muttered to himself; "but boys *is* very troublesome, and so *is* little girls; and, by me shoul, I'd rather be driving a pig to market—and that's sorra work—than minding 'im."

The upward slope of the hills soon began, and with it the beautiful woodland increased; and here several stony track-ways diverged to the left. They took the widest, but the rough condition of the ground necessitated slow progress, and often brought them to a standstill. As by Denis's desire they had in starting diverged so much to the right, they were only a little away beyond the line of the Grange when one of these halts came; and, looking down towards it as they momentarily paused, they saw Mrs. Hexham ride away and take the post-road towards the castle. To her saddle hung various small baskets and parcels, and at least one portfolio; and she seemed to enjoy the splendid beauty of the autumn morning, for she paused often to view the exquisite pictures on sea and shore, and more than once spread out her hand or raised her face towards the sky—listening perhaps to the song of the skylark, though but faintly heard in the swell and sweep of the ocean. As she thus rode slowly on and neared the road which diverged from the post-road to the shore, they saw Dr. Marlow riding quickly on from the castle, and, meeting her, shake her by the hand. He then turned his horse, and they rode slowly on together, often pausing, and, as it seemed, talking

earnestly. The children saw the horses pass the turning to the shore with some surprise.

"Why, old Grimwig is taking mamma to the castle!" exclaimed Arthur with astonishment.

"I had no opportunity to tell you, Arthur, yesterday," whispered Freda, "but I am sure mamma went there while we were at the cave. On our way there, if you recollect, I ran back for Kathie's doll. Going upstairs quickly, I saw her so prettily dressed in that charming black silk gown she had made just as we left London. Her hair had been freshly arranged since breakfast; she had on her nicest collar and cuffs, the former fastened with the pretty Wedgwood brooch she so prizes. She did not know I saw her, and I thought if I mentioned it she might think I had been inquisitive when I was not."

"If she has been to the castle, then I'm sure she knows its secret," said Arthur and Walter in a breath.

"I am certain she does," continued Freda; "and from her grave and earnest manner I am sure it is one connected with a sorrow. Dear mamma is always so earnest when she is sorrowful. Therefore, dear Arthur, as it is something painful, do not let us strive more to find it out."

"I *will* find it out," was Arthur's emphatic reply. "I hate secrets; and why we should not know *this*, I cannot see!"

"Don't dispute any more," said Walter, "but rather ride on and see if Mrs. Hexham really goes into the castle. If we go up the hill a little more, we may be able to overlook the gates and lodges which lie on this side, and which as yet we have only seen from a distance."

So they rode upwards amid the trees—from necessity taking a circuitous route, as the rocks in many places were steep, and the undergrowth which flourished in their hollows very dense. But they took care to keep to the left.

They were rewarded for so doing by coming out on to a

platform varied by jutting crags, which rose in an unbroken wall from the valley below, and quite overlooked the castle and grounds on this eastern side. There was room between the crags for their ponies to stand ; and, if they wished it, they could see without being seen. As they did, they were careful to keep sufficiently in the rear. By this time the autumnal day had broadened, and the sun shedding its divine light in full refulgence, every portion of the castle which lay towards them, though some little distance off, was distinctly visible to their keen young sight.

They had not to wait long ; and their surmises proved correct. Dr. Marlow and Mrs. Hexham rode up to the gates, and a porter clad in undress livery, issuing from one of two lodges on either hand, admitted them. Then they rode on to the entrance porch, the wide, broad way thereto being beautifully bordered with magnificent patches of shrubbery, and also with lawn and flower borders. Several footmen in scarlet liveries and powdered wigs lounged about the door, as also a groom. When Dr. Marlow had alighted and had assisted Mrs. Hexham, the latter held the horses while they went within—a servant in plain clothes leading the way, and the others following. The children could see the Doctor and Mrs. Hexham cross a portion of a wide hall, a minute afterwards they were winding their way up a staircase ending in a gallery, and then, at last, they were lost to view.

When their wondering curiosity was thus satiated, and nothing more was to be seen, the children turned to go. They had no time to speak their respective thoughts, for they had to regain the road old Denis expected them to follow : once only, when Freda rode ahead, Walter whispered to Arthur, "What a place for the telescope !"

"No !" was the reply : "Mr. Mystery's rooms lie towards the lakes ; it is in that direction we must look."

With difficulty they regained the proper road. When thus

they reached it, they found old Denis waiting for them, and rather cross he was.

"Ye divil-me-care scampering things!" he exclaimed, "why couldn't ye kape to the right instid of the lift, as I tould ye? Taking care of childer! it's dreadful work, specially to an ould man like me. Och! the grate ladies had better have sit me to stone-cracking, or pig-driving, than *this*." And old Denis wiped his forehead and groaned.

Making some plausible excuse for their absence, the sinning children soon soothed the kind old servant's momentary irritation, and promising to keep with him the rest of the way, they were presently riding onwards in great harmony.

A rugged road over the hill they had climbed brought them to Islandmore—a small, but most picturesque village, lying at the southern end of one of the long chain of lakes that penetrated the gorges of the hills in various directions. Money well spent, and enlightened and unceasing care, had within recent years transformed Islandmore from a mere assemblage of rude cabins, scarcely fit for the dwellings of pigs, into a village such as is seen in the best parts of England. A church and several chapels, a large and efficient school-house, a lending library and a small reading-room, a large well-kept village green, made shady by fine trees, and in parts prettily decorated with flower-borders, and the agent Mr. Miltown's house, a simple yet tasteful structure, all testified to generous superintendence and rule. Throughout Ireland, the Ladies Clare were renowned for the excellent management of their vast estates; and in no portion was it more conspicuous than in this neighbourhood; where for so many years they had chosen to live, in a seclusion rarely broken except by the visits of English and Irish relatives.

Old Denis had a kindly word to say to almost every one he met, and soon led the way to the cottage of Lally Shiel,

the carpenter, who fortunately was at work with his three sons and several journeymen in his large shop hard by ; and having had orders from the castle to aid the boys in respect to their house, he fixed a day for going over to the isle, and there giving his opinion on divers points relative to the carpenter's work to be done to the house. They then rode about the village ; and Denis would have taken them to see the agent, but Mr. Miltown and his family were at that date in England. Thus the morning passed quickly by, and the church clock had struck twelve when they turned into the post-road which led back to Morr. In the distance, as they passed on, they saw the castle gates ; but Denis made no remark, nor did they.

Much to the satisfaction of Dr. Marlow and the Ladies Clare, Arthur's arm grew rapidly better, and his power to use it gradually returned. He, as well as the rest, heard with much joy that Nero's life had been spared, and this entirely owing to the joint letter, which had greatly pleased the ladies. "It was good," they had said, "for children to practise the virtue of forgiveness, and it might be that Nero would yet repay them for their mercy." That these ladies' words were strikingly and happily prophetic, we shall see.

Next day Dr. Marlow resumed his lessons at the tower, and continued them with unusual regularity. The children won his praise by their steady diligence and care, and he soon said that when next he rode to see Mrs. Hexham, which would be in a few days, his report would, he was sure, lead to their holiday at the coastguardsmen's hut.

One morning, when they had assembled and were preparing their lessons, Dr. Marlow came in and said that Nero was outside.

"He has his collar and chain on," he said ; "and I have a whip in my pocket, so that he can do no mischief. If you are not afraid, Arthur, I should like him to come in, for I wish to effect a reconciliation. His understanding and

sensibility are marvellous, and he already comprehends that he has highly and greatly offended. This being the case, I think if you pat him and speak very kindly, he will understand that he is forgiven, and will sin no more."

"I am not afraid," said Arthur bravely ; "I am not afraid of any man, much less of a brute."

"That is well said," the Doctor replied gravely ; "but even forgiveness has its limits. The brute will forgive if you trespass no more upon his domain. You understand me, I am sure : with this proviso, Nero will do no further harm."

Arthur made no reply ; and the Doctor, taking silence for assent, went forth, and presently returned, leading the great animal in by the chain. He brought him to where the boy sat, and then stood still. The animal crouched down and stretched out his nose upon his fore-paws, and so lay in silence for a few minutes.

"Get up," the Doctor commanded in a stern voice. The dog rose, and, looking Arthur in the face, growled in a low undertone.

"Silence, sir," and the Doctor brought forth the whip.

"See ! you bit the boy ; and here is your punishment if you bite again." And the Doctor struck him heavily.

Nero sprang back as far as he could, but the Doctor dragged him forward.

"Beg the boy's pardon, you bad animal ; let him know you are sorry—very sorry. His poor arm ! How cruel to bite it !" The Doctor drew his hand tenderly over Arthur's shoulder and arm, and shook his head.

Nero watched the Doctor's eye, whined piteously several times ; then rising slowly on his hind-quarters, laid his great fore-paws very softly on Arthur's knees as he sat on the form, and on these he placed his head. There he let it rest, and whined again in a very doleful and beg-pardon manner.

"I know the brute's way very well," the Doctor said ;

"he really understands that he has sinned, and sues for pardon."

"Does he?" asked Arthur incredulously; "he growled a minute ago. This does not look as though he was conscious of what he had done."

"I think he does now; he supposed you had not forgiven him, and were still angry. Pat his head kindly, speak cheerfully, and he will understand all."

Arthur obeyed gladly, for he loved animals, and had a most forgiving nature. A short and joyous bark was the response; then, with an almost human expression of tenderness, Nero raised his head, nestled it softly on the boy's shoulder, and let it lay there.

"Nero knows now you have forgiven him, and will be happy, I am sure, as also henceforth very good to you."

As the Doctor spoke, the great creature moved its head and licked Arthur's face and hands with an expression of deep humility. Then it nestled itself down under the form where he sat, and with a heavy sigh, as though of relief, went off to sleep, and the lessons of the day proceeded.

Ever since their last visit to the cave, Arthur and Walter had been thinking of the telescope, and of their chance of obtaining it for a few days.

"We would take care to put it back again in the same place," said Arthur, "and would not keep it long. But if we could have it with us when we begin again to work at the house, we might see a great deal we cannot otherwise."

It so happened, however, that their various lessons kept them closely employed, and thus for some days they had no time for any lengthened ramble either on the moors or on the shore. They were thus much pleased when Dr. Marlow one morning told them that he was going on the morrow to see Mrs. Hexham, and, as Miss Haller would be fully occupied, they might take a holiday.

On their way home, and while in advance of the rest, Arthur said to Walter, "Let us try and get into the cave by way of the moor. I think if we play with the girls all the morning on the shore we could give them the slip in the afternoon. If they go with us they will want to go in; and the place is so dangerous, not to speak of their chattering about all they see."

"It will be a capital opportunity," added Walter; "for do you know what Denis told me yesterday? Why, Forbes is going away in the fourgon this afternoon to some distant town to buy stores, and will not be back till to-morrow night. She occasionally goes this journey; and we shall be safe. But we had better not tell the girls."

Forbes, however, made no secret of her intention, for she told them of it after dinner, asked them if they had any commissions, and bade them be good while she was away, as also obedient, for Freda would head the table. They readily promised, and ran off as quickly as they could to their playroom to write down various commissions for paper, fishing-tackle, ribbons, and a long *etcetera*.

They played all the next morning on the shore with the girls, and after dinner Freda asked them what they were going to do.

"Why, we want to fish a little in the burn beyond the Grange," replied Walter; "it holds capital trout, and we have never tried it. We will take Harold with us."

"Well, go," replied Freda, unsuspectingly; "but don't go rambling away. We have got some sewing to do, and mean to sit in the playroom till you come back to tea."

In order to cover their intention of going to the cave, the boys hunted up their fishing tackle and went off with it as quickly as they could, taking their way to the burn lest they should be seen from the house. Portions of the beautiful stream were hidden by trees, so as soon as they reached

their shadow they hid their fishing-tackle and took the direction of the moors. They had hills to climb, and a long way to go, and now the days were growing short there was not a minute to lose.

At length, from the bearings of sea and hills, Arthur felt sure they were in the right neighbourhood ; and he and Walter looked around them for the great clump of juniper and furze bushes to which they had tied the handkerchief. But it was one among thousands of others covering miles of waste, and could not be found ; and it was soon obvious that the handkerchief which had been tied to one of the bushes had been removed.

Presently, however, while searching about—Arthur, from the bearings of coast and hills, being sure that the neighbourhood was the right one—the boys noticed a narrow trackway winding sinuously amid the bushes, and, looking presently closer, they observed, where the ground was moist, that it had been recently much trodden by men and ponies. Following this for some way through the furze, they came out upon what they knew at once was the landward entrance to the cave. It had not been very carefully closed, and the whole vicinity had been trodden into quagmire—the rims of small barrels' ends, the hoofs of ponies, and the heavy tread of men's feet, marking it all over.

"Here is the place !" Arthur and Walter exclaimed in a breath ; "and no doubt they have been unloading and loading the ponies which come from the hills, for Denis says they bring whisky from the mountain-stills—of which it is well known Quinlivan has several—and take back fine French brandy and Spanish and Portugal wines, besides beautiful lace, silk, and such foreign porcelain as yet pays a heavy duty if imported into England. All these marks are very recent : not later perhaps than last night."

"Then the vessel of which the coastguardsman spoke

must have been in," replied Walter quickly ; " and it may be that they are this moment on Quinlivan's track. They want the man more than the goods ; for, as Denis says, if they can once capture him, they will obtain the large reward offered by Government, and do much towards putting a final stop to a contraband traffic which for years has stood in the way of any real improvement of the population of this coast."

" I am sure I saw a coastguardsman or two as we came along," said Harold.

" Most likely, then, there are some on the shore. I'll see." And Arthur as he spoke broke his way through that part of the furze-clump which lay towards the shore. Gaining the edge of the steep, rocky cliffs, he looked cautiously down, and then saw that though none of the coastguard were visible on the beach, at least half a dozen were hidden here and there in rocky fissures, or behind jutting crags.

Seeing this, he came back quietly, and whispered to the others, " The men are after Quinlivan, I am sure. Perhaps he is in the cave. What shall we do? Shall we venture in this way or not?"

" Let us go in," the other two answered ; " we can creep cautiously. When once we have got the telescope we'll come back again. Let us go."

With some little difficulty they moved aside the turf-covered stone and descended the winding steps—the roar of the waterfall soon becoming audible. When they reached the platform, they saw that the planks which formed the bridge lay across the fissure. These were very wet and soil-covered, and bore the marks of having been much and recently trodden over by men's feet, for the prints of their heavy shoes were plainly visible. Arthur and Walter did not think it safe for Harold to cross such a perilous spot ; they therefore placed him at the rear of the waterfall, and bade

him stand there till they returned. They then softly descended the steps towards the cave, listening as they went. To their surprise a gleam of light soon became visible, and gradually increased ; till, reaching the lower steps, they saw it came from the great cave. Its entrance stood open, as the sliding mass of rock which formed the door had been pushed back ; and thus the great peat fire which usually burnt on the hearth was plainly visible, as also the interior of the cave beyond. Seeing this, Walter clutched Arthur's arm and wanted to beat retreat, but the latter shook his head.

"No," he whispered ; "now we have come so far, let us try for the telescope. I'll creep forward and see. Perhaps the men have just gone away, or are resting or sleeping after a long day's work."

He breathlessly crept forward and peered within the cave—the strong firelight enabling him to see distinctly everything within it.

It was occupied, for several men lay stretched on the floor apparently asleep, while another sat leaning by the fire. He held a newspaper before his face, and he was probably smoking, for a strong smell of tobacco passed from the cave up the steps. Arthur guessed at once that this last man was Quinlivan, for, so far as his dress could be seen, it was that of a gentleman.

The boy stole back a few yards and struck a match. Its light showed that where he stood was just without the recess in which he had seen the telescope. He struck another match and looked within ; and there, to his delight, it was, on the very shelf on which he had previously seen it. Without a moment's hesitation he crept forward and seized it, and then ascended to where Walter stood.

"I've got it," he whispered in an agitated voice—"that's to say, borrowed it. We will take care to replace it. Now

let us go ! There are men in the cave, and we might not be safe if they found us."

He was really frightened, and so was Walter ; and they both scampered up the steps as fast as they could. But there were many, and before they had well reached the platform their fear deepened into terror ; for, from below, and whence they had just ascended, rose the loud voices of contentious, angry men. Then followed pistol shots and louder cries.

"Come on, come on, Walter !" gasped Arthur, in what was almost a speechless agony of terror ; "the coastguard have caught Quinlivan. Come on ! the voices and feet are ascending this way." As he spoke he seized Walter's hand, and together they fled up on to the platform, and across the bridge of planks to where Harold stood, already very much frightened at being alone in such a terror-striking place. Him they dragged on to the farthest rear of the thundering waterfall, and there, amid the mist and drenching spray, they crouched down and listened as well as the dread roar around them permitted. They did not wait long. In an instant or two, as it seemed—it was scarcely more—three men rushed up on to the platform, across the bridge, and so towards the steps leading outward ; other men followed,—a pistol shot was fired, a human cry arose, a foremost man rushed back, and, lifting the planks with giant force, hurled them down into the abyss below. Another human cry arose, more awful still.

"He's gone—he's gone !" was cried. "Poor Joe ! Great God, what an awful place ! That villain has got off too, though I think he's desperately wounded. Benwell and Smith, go back to the cave and get planks ; we must cross if we can."

The boys crouched down still more closely, and, fortunately, they remained unseen, though several coastguardsmen went very near.

Planks being quickly brought from the cave below, all the men but two crossed the ravine and dashed up the steps in mad pursuit. Those left peered down the ravine for their comrade, but of course in vain.

"He's gone down hundreds of feet," said one. "Poor fellow!" he added; "what a death to die!"

"He mayn't be lost altogether," spoke the other. "Below, at the rear of the cave, are several openings where the water can be seen rushing down. Perhaps we can save him yet, Jim. Let us go!" They dashed off, and the place was clear.

"Now let us run for our lives," spoke Arthur, "and try to get out, or we may be shut in for ever."

Trembling so that they could hardly get on, they helped each other up the steps—only fearing they might be seen if the men returned or followed them. As the light increased, Arthur stopped a moment. Drops of blood had been visible all the way; here they were gathered in a greater mass, and went no further up the ascending steps. He looked around him, and in the shadows of one side saw a recess.

"Quinlivan stayed here," he whispered; "and the coast-guard are off on the wrong scent. But we must say nothing: he is our dear little Kathie's father. Some other day we will come again and look."

They then hurried on, and soon reached the top; and only just in time. The coastguard were returning, having discovered, as was apparent, that Quinlivan had escaped them. Crouching down and going on all-fours, they crept into the furze, and lay there breathless till the men had passed out of sight down the steps. Then they crept forward, through various sinuous openings and tracks, till at last they cautiously rose and sped on as though an enemy were behind them. The telescope safe, they had had enough of the cave for the present.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RUINED HALL.

EARLY autumn had come, and the beautiful woods about Morr began to show their fairest tints. Mrs. Hexham still remained away at the coastguardsmen's hut ; and Arthur's arm being now quite well, he and the other boys resumed their house-building. On those days they did not go to their lessons at the tower, they started early to the isle, and worked till dusk began to show ; then they returned to the Grange to tea, and after an hour's fun with the girls, they studied their next day's lessons. About twice a week Miss Haller spent the evenings with them ; and occasionally on the afternoons of school-days they had a ride on to the hills or into the woods with Freda and the rest, or else a run along the shore to the cave. But that place was now quite desolate. It stood open for any one to tread, for the coastguard had broken down its barriers and doors, and, so far as they knew, none of its secret places were unrevealed.

The weather being dry and warm, the house progressed famously. It was so comparatively easy to build, for the stones which had been selected ranged from the size of a large orange to that of a full-sized loaf, and all of them had been more or less smoothed by the action of the elements through countless ages. Occasionally larger stones were used—as in the foundations, the doorways, or in strengthening the towers—but, generally speaking, they were easy to move and handle.

Old Mike, who had been long used to such work, always prepared the mortar, and Pat helped in other ways. Ladders and barrows were sent for from Islandmore, and so the work progressed.

In all concerning it, Arthur showed pre-eminent ability and skill for one so young. Nature seemed to have designed him for an architect, just as she gives to one man a fine ear for music or to another an irrepressible longing to be a painter. Though he could draw tolerably, he knew nothing of even the elementary portion of mechanical laws ; yet he could lay out, adjust, and fix with unerring skill. Of this the various curves of the three long rooms and oriels, and of the towers, gave striking evidence.

But, as the tints deepened in the woods, and the weeks of autumn waned, it became obvious to Dr. Marlow, who took great interest in the work, as also to old Mike, that the house could not be finished till another year. So, after due consultation, it was resolved to cover in the walls so far as they had progressed (which was about half-way) with straw and planks, placing on these last some specially heavy stones to be fetched purposely from the shore. This would keep them dry, and prepare them for another season.

So Lally Shiel and his two sons were sent for from Islandmore to help in the work ; and, while it was in progress, the first taught Arthur how to take measurements for door-frames and window-frames. These, as he said, could be made at the Grange during the winter if a room or outhouse could be spared in which could be placed a carpenter's bench and other appliances. Accordingly, as all the boys were very desirous of learning carpentering, Dr. Marlow was consulted. He at once gave his assent, said he should be very glad for them to acquire the rudiments of such a useful trade, and added that there were several spare outhouses at the Grange. He then engaged old Shiel to come over

occasionally in the winter, and show them how to plane, hammer, saw, and dovetail, and everything else of utility in his craft.

While these preparations for the winter were proceeding at the isle, a great trouble befell all at the Grange. One rather bleak noon, after returning from the tower to dinner, the children found Forbes, Denis, and the two maids in much consternation. Kathie was missing, and had been so about an hour. Forbes said the child had been with her most of the morning, and when last seen she stood in the porch with her doll. She often stood there as the hour approached for the children's return ; and if it were a sunny morning she would go a little way to meet them, for she had grown to love them all most tenderly—the three elder ones especially—often calling Freda her "little mourvreen."

They could eat no dinner, or indeed do anything but wander about in search of her. No traces, however, could be found, except that in the avenue, behind a clump of mingled laurels and hollies, Arthur and old Denis detected the marks of several ponies' feet. They followed these to and from the post-road, and thence towards the moorland leading to the shore, and there they were lost. These marks made the fact almost clear that more than one person had been lying in wait, and by them the child had been borne away, probably to some place where her father was.

The children had always one source of comfort, when trouble befell, in her whom they all loved tenderly—Mrs. Hexham. So, as soon as evening came, and further search was necessarily deferred till daylight broke again, they each wrote her a letter, telling her of their great sorrow. Even ordinarily they were always writing letters to her ; and now, of course, when a real tribulation was present, their pens were ready and their words fluent. They entreated her to come home, if only for a day—for if she returned they felt

sure some clue or other would be discovered in relation to the whereabouts of their little favourite.

They put all six letters in one packet, and next morning mounted their ponies and rode away to Mike's cottage. When they reached it, the old man was about starting for a day's fishing, for, as he said, "the grate ladies would be nading fish for their morrow's dinner." But when they told him of their dear little Irish Kathie being spirited away, he added, "Och, and he was shure the grate ladies would be nading fish for iver and iver rather than the purty little crathur with a vagabond father shouldn't be sought for as far as the bounds of ould Ireland wint." So he took his nets, lines, and hooks from his boat, tied it to its accustomed stake, put on his old frieze coat, and, with his staff in his hand, went on his way along the rugged and perilous shore—now made more perilous by reason that winter was approaching, and that the sea was rough and wild.

He reached the coastguardsmen's hut late in the afternoon, just as Mrs. Hexham had returned drenched and tired from a day's sketching of the "Witches' Cauldron" and "Timber Cove." She read the notes at once, and was deeply concerned to hear of Kathie's absence and the children's sorrow. So, as soon as she had changed her dress and taken a little hot coffee, she wrote an answer, which said that, "were it sufficiently fine on the morrow, she would return to the Grange for two or three days. Longer she feared she could not stay, as she had yet some sketching to do before winter set in." To this she added that, "having had from Dr. Marlow so excellent an account of their behaviour and diligence during her absence, for reward they should return with her to the hut, and, under the coastguardsmen's care, see some of the wonderful scenes which lay in its neighbourhood." When this note was ready, and he had been refreshed by food, old Mike started off on his return, smoking his short pipe as he

went, and occasionally stopping to sip a little something out of a bottle the coastguard had given to him ere he departed. He needed, poor old man, to cheer his heart, for the night was wild, the shore very lonely, and the mingled roar of sea and wind almost deafening.

It was far past midnight when he reached his cabin ; but he was early astir again, and by breakfast-time the children received the note. They were delighted with it, for Mrs. Hexham always wrote so charmingly ; and her promise of immediate return greatly comforted them. If she came, they felt sure some likely plan for Kathie's recovery would be suggested and carried out.

It was their morning for school, and they carried the note with them to the tower, for their very able master always liked to read Mrs. Hexham's notes. He always seemed to guess when such had been received ; and when not brought or shown to him, he always asked for them. What was more, he always borrowed and took them away with him ; and too often, much too often, they were never returned. The children grumbled, more especially if these charming letters contained little sketches in pencil, chalk or colours, which they often did ; and next time they received such, they determined to say nothing about them. But so sure as they came, the Doctor knew, and so again they were borrowed and never returned.

Freda, Arthur and Walter were often inclined to fly into open rebellion on this point. "The letters," they said, "would be so charming, with their choice little sketches, if put together and bound as a book. We would keep it, and look at it when we were grown up. Why should we be deprived of what is ours ?"

Arthur was still more savage. "Depend upon it," he confided to Freda, "old Grimwig is in love with Edith. The end of it will be, he will marry her : and what then ?"

"That he will make us a very good uncle." And Freda laughed.

As a matter of course, as soon as Kathie's abduction became evident, information of it was sent to Dr. Marlow. With his usual promptitude he at once took the matter in hand. He sent off a messenger to the nearest police station, and on his own part made inquiries in various directions ; but without other result than that there was brought to him a rumour of a recent and fierce encounter between the smugglers and coast-guardsmen, during which, though badly wounded, Quinlivan had escaped. It thus became at once evident to the Doctor that Kathie's removal was in some way connected with this circumstance.

The same idea occurred immediately to Mrs. Hexham. So, as soon as old Mike had started off on his return to Morr, she sent for Benwell, who had already told her how a large body of his division, under the command of Captain Fairholt, had had a fierce encounter with the smugglers. Quinlivan, to their great chagrin, had escaped, though, as it was supposed, very seriously, if not mortally, wounded ; but their seizure of contraband goods had been considerable, and, so far as they knew, they had opened up all the hiding-places in the great cave on the southern shore, which for years had been the smugglers' chief resort.

When Benwell came, Mrs. Hexham told him of the children's letters, and of her purpose to return to Morr on the morrow for a few days. She then asked him his opinion as to the motive for Kathie's abduction.

"One connected with her father, no doubt, my lady. If Quinlivan was mortally wounded, as Captain Fairholt and his men think, the reason may be that the child should see him before he dies. Or, if only injured—and that must have been badly enough—he may be going to Spain, and the child with him. His escape, the men say, was like a miracle. It would

not have been effected, but that one of Quinlivan's men, while pursuit was at the hottest, stepped back, and by a giant force of strength, threw down an abyss, into which pours a waterfall of great power, two long planks which lay across the rocky fissure, and which they had been accustomed to use as a bridge. One of our men went down with them, and, as those supposed who were off in pursuit of Quinlivan as soon as fresh planks had been brought up from the cave and laid across the ravine, he had perished. But those who remained thought otherwise. In searching the various openings from the cave, they had noticed that, at about two hundred feet below the fall, the water was broken up into foamy masses through meeting a vast pile of jagged rocks. Thus urged into fresh and much narrower channels, it poured down hither and thither in lesser streams,—these occasionally passing through or beside the openings nature has formed in the mighty seaward cliffs. They therefore made immediate search, and, to their great relief, found his clothing had caught on a crag, and though half drowned, senseless, much bruised and cut, he had been spared from being carried down into hidden depths unknown to man. For a couple of days our men stayed and nursed him in the cave. He was then removed to Islandmore, where he is now recovering."

"And Quinlivan : what of him ?" asked Mrs. Hexham.

"Why, madam, when our captain and the men had crossed the ravine, they pursued him and one or two of his gang, as they thought, up a long flight of artfully-constructed steps opening out on to the moor. But there they could find no traces of him. They then returned, and, looking carefully as they descended, found on one step a pool of blood. They followed drops of this to the spot where he was shot, and there, as a matter of course, they ceased. This is all that is known of Quinlivan. He

escaped ; but how, is an utter mystery. The only conclusion is that there exist in these caves many natural passages and fissures unknown but to him and the most trusted of his gang."

"Indeed ! And no further search was made ?"

"Oh yes—but without result ; and the probability is, he is dead. The only thing we know is that the old woman you have had at the Grange has been seen about the country a good deal, and when last heard of she was in the neighbourhood of his ruined hall. It stands in a beautiful vale about twenty miles from Morr. Nothing can be gathered from those who were his tenants ; for, wretched and impoverished as the larger part of them are, they are much his friends, and glory rather than not in his lawless deeds and dissolute way of living."

"Thank you, Benwell. The clue, such as it is, may be worth following. I have no interest in Quinlivan, but I have in his child. She has become very dear to the children I teach ; and their grief, if I may judge from the letters Mike brought, is very sincere. I will therefore, if possible, for her own sweet sake as much as theirs, bring her back among us, and surround her once more with the influences which lie in tenderness and culture. I shall start for Morr in the morning, and take Patrick with me."

"More than Patrick, madam, though he is a good and steady lad. I and one of our men must accompany you. We have the strictest orders as to your safety. The weather indications for to-night and to-morrow are not good ; though it is possible fair autumn weather may follow. We will therefore, Mrs. Hexham, in order to have the day before us, start early in the morning. You will need to put on your waterproof wraps ; and I will take care that Pat shall bring you coffee betimes and Jove be ready at the door."

Mrs. Hexham acquiesced in this arrangement, and the stalwart coastguardsman, making his military salute, withdrew.

It was indeed a wild and prematurely wintry morning ! The wind was high, and, blowing in from the sea, brought with it dense clouds of spray and foam ; and the waves, urged landward by the same great force, dashed far beyond their usual limits. Meeting resistance in the mighty piled-up masses of jagged rocks, they recoiled in still greater fury and sublime wildness. Their roar was deafening ; and their spray, commingling with the heavy rain, made the shore, even a quarter of a mile inland, often all but impassable. Occasionally the weird, wild moorland was a treacherous bog, into which retreat was impossible ; the lesser danger being to face the clouds of spray and foam, and pass at once through the open spaces left momentarily by the retreating waves. Sometimes masses of rock served as a protecting wall, and oftener the inland bog gave place to broad stretches of thymy downs ; but even over these the mist and spray occasionally swept inward in vast clouds, wetting, almost as rain would do, those who passed through them.

Benwell often entreated Mrs. Hexham to turn back again, but she smiled, and said with such good protectors she would rather pass on : she would be expected at Morr, and her non-arrival would give rise to the keenest apprehension as to her safety. So the men, seeing her resolve, did their utmost to protect her from the mingled violence of wind and sea. Sometimes they suddenly seized Jove's bridle and dragged him forward ; at others they drew him back, and when the edge of a breaker was on them before they were aware, they broke its force by bending downwards from their own saddles towards hers. Of course both men and lady were drenched to the skin—poor little Pat being worse off than the rest, as he travelled on foot. At length Benwell's

companion took him up on the saddle behind him, and better progress was made.

As the afternoon progressed Castle Morr came into distinct view, and, owing to the protection of the headlands, the force of wind and sea was broken. Here, beneath the shelter of a rock, they found Dr. Marlow awaiting them. He was on horseback ; and several of his dogs, Nero among them, were buffeting with wild delight amid the breakers.

"Any other lady than you, Mrs. Hexham," he said, "I should not have expected. You, I did ; and thus, you see, my belief is not falsified. I am very glad to see you. So will the children be."

"They are well, I hope ? I, too, long to see them. Being away from them is exile to me. We have had a really terrible journey here ; but the season is rapidly waning, and the weather beginning to be capricious. If I did not come home to-day the wind might be worse to-morrow, and thus time would be lost."

"True ; but you must not stay to talk. You are wet, and must be chill. Let us ride on : bright fires and loving welcomes are awaiting you, I know. This way : to-day the shore is impassable by the headland-cove. Benwell, take Jove's rein ; we must cross the high ground at the seaward foot of the lake, and so round the end of the park to the post-road. Ride on,—the wind is growing very cold."

The horses were put to their speed, and in less than an hour they had gained the post-road, at a point where its beautiful woodland fringes were dyed in all the glory of autumnal tints. Just where the avenue behind the Grange commenced, and the sombre hue of its magnificent cedar trees lent the finest contrast to the browns, yellows, and buffs of the foliage around, they came upon a pretty sight. Some workmen had been stripping felled trees, and with the bark Arthur had ingeniously built a little hut. Well

sheltered in this, the children awaited her they loved so tenderly, and, heedless of the rain, they kissed her hand and then ran on before to meet her in the porch and lead her in.

The brightest fires and a most bounteous meal awaited her,—for which last delicacies had been sent down from the castle. That morning, stormy as it had been, the girls and Harold had been into the woods and on to the hills, and gathered a variety of ferns, mosses, sprays of berried plants, and many choice specimens of late autumnal flowers; and with these the various tables, pieces of furniture, and other places were decked. But all the choicest were set about the studio, and there the ferns and tinted leaves were most lovely to behold.

The girls ran upstairs with Mrs. Hexham, and waited while she changed her dress. Then they returned with her, and gathered about the table—boys and girls alike chattering and asking innumerable questions. Dr. Marlow, as Milly said, “waited in the studio till tea was over.”

When this was the case he came in, and Mrs. Hexham repeated to him what she had learnt from Benwell as to old Norah having been seen in the neighbourhood of Quinlivan’s ruined hall.

“It is the only clue we have to the old nurse, who, more than any one else, will know where the child is; and if we are to save her, we ought, I think, to follow it up.”

“Certainly: but how? We cannot employ the coastguard or the police, for if Quinlivan be still alive it will be setting the hounds upon the stricken deer.”

“I have already considered that, Dr. Marlow,” she answered. “Benwell tells me that Quinlivan’s ruined hall lies about twenty miles from here. If I can obtain a guide I will ride there, and take the elder children with me. The old mourvreen might show herself to me, if to no one else;

and the intense love of the child for Freda and Arthur would not fail, I think, to readily win her back."

"True ; but in case of Quinlivan's death there might be relations to claim her."

"Perhaps so. But all this I can best learn from old Norah herself. I will go, Doctor, and that as soon as may be."

"But the ride is a long one, and some of the hills very steep. The days, too, are now shortening. You could not go twenty miles and return the same day. Where could you lodge for the night?—that is the question."

"If I can obtain a guide, he may know of some wayside cabin or farm. For a few hours I and the children must be content to rough it. It will be well for the latter to learn, even thus briefly, that nothing worth having in this life is to be obtained without labour and more or less self-sacrifice."

"Mrs. Hexham, you are giving us all lessons of value. Well, I will inquire after some one who knows the hills. But to-night you are fatigued, and so must rest to-morrow. The next morning all shall be ready, and if fine you can start : that is to say, if the guide knows of some place where you can shelter for the night—not without."

Dr. Marlow said this in his usual brief and sententious manner, and adding a kindly "good-evening," went.

Mrs. Hexham was truly glad to rest on the morrow and be quiet with the children. They had so much to tell her, and she in return to tell them ; and they were enraptured to think that, were the weather fine enough, they would return with her for a few days to the coastguardsmen's hut. For they all so longed to see the "Devil's Net," "Timber Cove," and the "Witches' Cauldron," now that the darker shadows of the autumn lay over these places, and the wilder seas of approaching winter swept round their rocky peaks and in and over their many winding channels and fissures. And

their desire to go was further intensified when they learnt that she had secured them many very pretty and interesting waits and strays for their museum.

In the evening a note came from Dr. Marlow to say that a guide had been secured, and that Mrs. Hexham and the elder children must be ready to start on the following morning by eight o'clock, provided the weather promised fair.

It more than promised : it proved divinely fair. Every trace of storm and cloud had passed away, and in their place lay the first blush of an Indian summer morn, lighting up the sea, and landward clearing away the mists from the hills. Rising at an earlier hour than usual, Mrs. Hexham and the children had breakfasted by half-past seven, and at eight o'clock the ponies stood at the porch door. One was to be led by the guide, and on this were strapped shawls, cloaks, waterproofs, baskets, and other things ; and another was to be ridden by Pat, who had pleaded hard to accompany "his lady," as he called her. No time was lost ; loving greetings were exchanged, and the little party rode away.

The guide, a stalwart peasant in the prime of life, and whose name was Tim Sullivan, made direct to those hilly moors which lay at the rear of the smugglers' cave. For some miles the way was sterile enough—nothing but stunted bushes, varied by great stretches of bog, being visible ; but at length these wastes gave place to higher land, and this in turn to hills covered by the richest turf, decked here and there by fringes of woodland—the last relics, it was said, of once vast forests. On the southern and eastern inclines of these hills pastoral-looking vales of varying size were seen, these beautified by streams and little lakelets, and occasionally by openings, through which were gained many lovely glimpses of the sea ; the waves sometimes darkly blue, at others flashing in all the glorious light of the Indian

summer's morn. There were but few habitations, and those very sparsely scattered.

A little past noon they descended into one of these valleys, through the centre of which dashed rather than flowed a winding brook—for it fell from a high level, and obstructed on its way by huge stones and scattered fragments of lichen and moss-covered rock, the water dashed over and round them in picturesque eddies and masses of foam. Here, on a plot of dry and velvety turf, they stayed and lunched, Forbes having taken care to fill several baskets with substantial food. After the meal the children played at "crossing the brook" by means of various tottering stones, wetting their feet as they did so; while Mrs. Hexham made a rapid sketch of the lovely scene—for she had brought materials with her. They then resumed their saddles and wound their way up a long, steep bank, which separated two hills. The road was narrow, and in parts very steep indeed, so that the ponies could advance but slowly. Thus there was time to observe that many portions of the hill-sides were bare of grass, and where this was the case a most beautiful, ruddy, and unctuous-looking clay appeared. Occasionally the colour was buff, crossed by veins of white; but whichever the colour, the clay was exquisitely fine and soft to the touch. Mrs. Hexham was about to remark that the region was fit for a pottery on a large scale, when Jove stumbled and nearly fell. Looking instantly down, she saw that the ground was covered with fragments of broken and many-coloured pots, and that the guide ahead was clearing away, so as to make the road passable, a pair of broken panniers. That the fragments of pottery had lain there some time was evident, as also that some poor beast had slipped and fallen over and over far down the road; and that here it was that the panniers it carried had become loosened and their contents destroyed—the broken-up roadway and adjacent banks showing clearly

that a fierce struggle had taken place between man and beast.

Always in search of objects for their museum, the boys in a moment were out of the saddle and turning over the broken fragments on the ground. The largest and best they held up for Mrs. Hexham's inspection—these being chiefly portions of jugs, basins, plates, and hollow pans. They were of local manufacture, it was evident, for they were formed of clays similar to those of the adjacent banks. Though coarse and badly fired, there was much originality in the decoration of the various pieces ; for, after the manner of Palissy-ware, the bodies were of one colour and the decorations in others, single or blended. Leaves, twigs, flowers, shells, and lines variously disposed, were prettily and artistically rendered. The fashioner had evidently had no other teacher than nature, yet the effects produced were occasionally charming.

"Surely I have seen some pottery like this before," said Mrs. Hexham, considering as she looked at the fragment of a pretty dish Arthur held up for her to look at.

"If ye please, me lady," chimed in Pat, who stood by, "it's like me grandmother's crame-jug that the wandering potter gave her."

"Yes, Pat ; now I recollect. It was the one your grandmother sent full of fine cream, the day we first took tea by the lake ! Yes ; I know I admired it. Most likely the place where these things are made is in this region, for here in these banks are the selfsame clays. When we reach the top of the hill we will look about us."

The boys picked up the best fragments and placed them in a half-emptied basket. They then remounted, and the little company proceeded.

When they reached the top of the hill Mrs. Hexham inquired of Sullivan if he knew of any potwork in this direction. The man thought a moment, and then shook his head.

"There may be, me lady. The likes of me don't remimber. There's a man wid a tall boy and some asses go wandering about the counthry, and they may carry th' pots and th' pans and th' dishes, and like things. Me Bridget, the crathur, would know,—not Tim Sullivan, me lady, who's ploughing or raping, or going to an' fro wid cattle to the hills. Och! if th' pots be made, it may be in that diriction, up by that grate wood there, long away." As he spoke Tim Sullivan pointed towards some hills far off in the blue distance.

"Much too far for us to go this journey, even were we sure there is such a place," replied Mrs. Hexham. "We can make search when spring or summer comes again. Now let us proceed; the afternoon will soon begin to wane."

For some distance the country became again alternate bog and moor, varied by broken ground, the ascents and descents of which were often steep, and between high banks of mingled turf and rock. Descending one of these, after a further journey of some miles, the sound of young voices was distinctly heard, and soon came in view a dozen or more ragged children, boys and girls. A few carried a dog-eared book or two, and most had a sorry basket or basin tied up in a piece of rag, as though they had taken their dinners with them. Some began to beg, others ran forwards, a few hung behind abashed. They were, with but one or two exceptions, rosy-looking and full of life and spirits.

At a touch of the bridle Jove stayed. "Have you been to school?" asked Mrs. Hexham.

The children knew English, and a few answered, "Yes."

"Where?"

Several pointed to the far distance, on the other side the valley.

"A long way off, I see. You leave early: it's not yet four o'clock."

"Ye see, me lady," chimed in Sullivan, who had stayed too, "the young crathurs, God be wid 'im, come far and have far to go. Some travel far into the hills, others cross the bogs. So the schoolmasther lets the farthest goers start early, so that they may carry the light o' day wid 'im."

"A very sensible plan indeed," answered Mrs. Hexham. Then, addressing the children, she asked if there was any place amid the hills where pots and pans were made.

"Yes," several replied—"over there." And they pointed in the direction Tim Sullivan had done.

"Is it far?"

Whether their idea was hazy as to distance or not, they did not reply to this question, but answered as though another had been put. "That boy makes pots; the father of 'im makes pots, and there's a bigger boy at home, and he's 'cutest of all."

"What's his name?"

"That boy?"—and they pointed to a wretchedly-clad lad in the distance—"why, he's Will Tarra, and him that's home is Phin Tarra."

Mrs. Hexham turned to Sullivan, and bade him ask the name of the potwork and its distance from where they stood. He obeyed, and speaking to the children in a brogue more ready to their comprehension than pure English, he soon elicited that the place was called Loughrea, and that the distance was about three miles. There was a nearer way through the bog, but it was dangerous except to those who knew it well.

"In that case we must leave a ride there till summer is here again. Pat, get out the cake we left at lunch, and divide among them. I never give pence. Irish boys want to be taught that begging and beggary go together."

Pat obeyed. The children who were gathered round took each one its share of the cake—as it seemed a little sullenly,

for, in the spirit of mendicancy in which they had been bred, they would have much preferred money. However, when they saw that there was no chance of it, they said, with irresistible Irish politeness, "Me thanks to ye, lady," and ran off with whoops of wild delight.

Passing out of the narrow valley to the heights above, there lay before them a wide stretch of moorland crossed by various roads, and backed in the distance by dun-looking mountains of considerable altitude. The sun was now beginning to decline, and the early shades of evening to fall upon the scene. Somewhat hesitatingly, as it seemed, Sullivan struck into one of the most conspicuous of these roads, and pursued it for a considerable distance. The sun set, darkness fell, and all that remained was a faint and rapidly fading twilight.

At length they reached a tangled maze of cross-roads, and here the guide paused, for he did not know which to take. Mrs. Hexham questioned him, and then he confessed he had come wrong. "It was long since he had been in these parts," he said; "and the divil himself, he was sure, would be puzzled wid sich rounding and twistings and turnings."

Mrs. Hexham was distressed. Where would she and the children get shelter for the night, in such a wild country? "The best thing we can do," she added, "will be to let Jove choose his road: I have put his sagacity to the test many times, and never found it at fault."

"We can look, too, for the schoolhouse the children came from, or some cabin or farm," remarked Arthur. "Any light from a dwelling will now begin to show."

Left to himself, Jove retraced for some distance the road they had come, and then unhesitatingly turned into another. It was now quite dark, so that with difficulty the little company tracked its way through the wildness of the moor. Presently they became aware that they were again veering

towards the sea, for in the intense stillness of the evening the dash of the surf on the shore was faintly audible. After a time the road made a sudden bend, and then all at once flashed into sight a dazzling, wavering light, as though of a newly-roused fire. It was a peat fire, for it had the sparkle and varying colour of such a one.

They hurried on, and at the distance of another half-mile came to four cross-roads again ; and here, at one of the angles, stood a large thatched building. It had several small-case-mented windows, through all of which the firelight shone. Looking through the nearest, they beheld a long schoolroom. Its forms were piled up for the night, and on a stool by the hearth sat a young man studiously absorbed in a book he read by the brilliant torch-like fire. The wayfarers rapped on the casement, but he did not hear; then Arthur and Walter jumped from their saddles, and looking out for the door, opened it and went in. They advanced to the hearth, touched the youth on the shoulder, and he starting to his feet, Arthur at once recollected that he had seen him before, and that was in the coach, on their long journey to Castle Morr. He as quickly recognised them, and great joy shone in his face.

"A wonder—a wonder!" he exclaimed. "I thought of you times and often, little gentleman. You gave me the books. Terence Foyle will never forget it."

It was especially pleasant to them to recognise some one they knew, however slightly ; so, after shaking Terence by the hand, they ran back and told Mrs. Hexham. She and Freda at once alighted and went within the schoolhouse, where the young man, having stirred up the fire till it glowed like a hundred torches, placed a form before it, and heartily welcomed them.

Mrs. Hexham at once explained their situation, and why they were travelling in so wild a country.

"It is good luck which brings you here, my lady," he replied joyfully. "This is Quinlivan's country, and his ruined hall is about six miles from here. But perhaps you do not know the man himself is dead? He was shot by the coastguard during an attempt to capture him, and, after lingering a day or two in a cave, he died. His body was brought to the hall, and for the two past nights his tenants and people have been 'waking' it, and they 'wake' it again to-night. To-morrow afternoon the funeral will take place. The whole affair has been kept as secret as could be, for Quinlivan had been outlawed twice, if not thrice, and a large reward had been offered for his capture. I have learnt this, my lady, from a boy who comes here, a tenant's son—for Quinlivan was a gentleman by birth, though a spendthrift, a smuggler, and in every way a vagabond."

"And the purpose of my visit is, as I have just told you, to save his child from a probable fate of poverty and wretchedness, for she has been living with us at the Grange at Morr, and we have all of us become greatly attached to her. But this is not the question at this moment. Our guide has lost his way, and we need a shelter for the night. Can you tell us of one? However humble it be, it will be welcome."

"Sure, my lady, my mother has a snug little home, and she and my two sisters will give you the best welcome in old Ireland. Sit still a bit: I'll run to the house, and tell 'em the honour that is done to me by the kind lady that helped me with books a while ago."

"Nay, do not announce us, Mr. Foyle; shelter and warmth are all we require, and the same for the boy and guide. Don't go beforehand! And to this let me add how glad I am that the few books you kindly mention have been of service. Serviceable indeed, if they have helped to realize your wish of being a schoolmaster, as I suppose you are now."

"But a deputy, my lady. The real master, Mr. O'Gorman, had need to go to England to see a brother lying ill. So I've taken his place till he's back again. The boys and girls all like me, and get on with their books wonderfully. No ! I'm going again to Dublin next month, for the letter from California has come at last, and all our troubles are ended. A good brother is Ambrose, my lady, and a pride to old Ireland."

"As so many of her sons are who go forth to battle with the world. But this news is really welcome ; for loving knowledge and culture for their own sakes, as you seem to do, Mr. Foyle, it will give you sterling and permanent joy to pursue them to a higher, and then still on to higher degrees. Nothing, as I have personally found, so brings content and softens the hardest lot, as knowledge of the truths which high culture unfolds. Now, if we may pass on to your mother's farm, we shall be glad, for we are cold and tired, and need to rest."

"Be patient, my lady, a minute ! Keep your feet in the blaze and cheer your heart ! I'll run to the widow, my mother, and Maggie and Julia ; it'll be breaking their hearts, and that's the truth, not to give you an Irish welcome."

And thus, as though wild with joy, the young schoolmaster bolted from the room, without even his hat. He was gone much longer than was pleasant to the tired wayfarers, but at last he came back, and was even more joyous than when he departed.

"Sure, and won't my mother give you a welcome ! The best feather bed is airing, my lady, and the tenderest hen's at the fire, and a bit of the prettiest pig too. And Julia—sure the sweet darling has a delicate hand for the mixing and kneading and turning—she's at the cakes, pretty one ! and Maggie's running about all in a fluster, like the wild young thing that she is. Come on, my lady, and you the sweet young lady, and the young gentlemen."

As he thus spoke Terence raked down the fire, so as to leave it safe, and then leading the way from the schoolroom, locked the door. Sullivan, Pat, and the ponies were already gone before, "to a bit of a cabin," as Terence explained, where his mother's cousin lived, and where they would have "meat and drink, enough and to spare."

The moon had by this time risen, and the night grown fair; so that, following Terence, and taking a road opposite to that by which they had reached the schoolhouse, the travellers soon began to descend into a pleasant valley spread out amid low-lying hills. A few small houses and cabins were scattered over it here and there; and where there was a croft and some semblance of a garden, stood a long, low, tile-roofed cottage, or rather farmhouse, of better aspect and more pretension than those neighbouring it. A porch door stood wide open, a large peat fire shone within, and cast its light so far abroad in welcome scintillations as to advance beyond the garden pathway into the road running by. In these welcoming rays, just without the gate, stood a comely matron of middle age, while behind her were two young girls, who, as soon as they saw the strangers, ran bashfully back, like frightened fawns.

"Shure, and ain't you wilcome, me lady, to the bist mate and dhrink the Widdy Foyle can giv' you, and the bist bed that's in the counthry! Did ye not giv' me Terence books when he naded 'im? Come in, me lady; the door is blissid ye cross."

"I am but a very simple person, Mrs. Foyle," replied Mrs. Hexham, "and I and these children with me require but plain accommodation—just shelter and warmth for a few hours. I only regret we trespass, coming so unexpectedly."

"Threspas, did ye say, me lady?—och, shure it's a grate pleasure. Sorra I am I hadn't a wake's notice, so as to put the bist in ould Ireland before ye. But come in: the threshold

is no place for a guest to stand by." So saying, Terence's mother went forward into a roomy kitchen, partly covered by an open loft, to which some ladder-like steps led up. There were several doors in this barn-like room, and one standing open showed a sort of parlour or spare chamber. This was probably intended for the female guests, as the foot of a wide stump bedstead piled up with bedding could be distinctly seen.

In the middle of the kitchen stood a large table spread with a decent tablecloth, and on this were already scattered a very heterogeneous assemblage of knives, forks, mugs and glasses—the probable result of hasty borrowings from the cottages around. And a meal was visibly preparing, for the girls had returned to the hearth, and now were frying and baking, as also basting a fowl which roasted in a tin.

"Shure, wouldn't I have had a thrate riddy for ye, me lady, had I known ye'd been honouring Laragh with yer prisince ! Terence, me boy, should have gone off to the town for tay—for shure there ain't a bit at Mother O'Dowd's or Honor Flannagan's. But there's milk and cheese, and dilicate thin cakes, and a bit of Tim O'Flynn's pig, and a chick that's tinder."

"A most bountiful feast indeed, Mrs. Foyle. Tea we have with us : your son, perhaps, will ask little Pat to hunt for it among the baskets. How nice the supper smells, and how cheery your hearth is ! This is indeed an Irish welcome."

"Not a grate wilcome, me lady, but a thrue one. The little gintlemin will stand by the blaze, while you and the little lady come wid me. A poor room, but the bist I've had time to put riddy."

Thus speaking, the widow led the way into the chamber where the stump bedstead had been seen, and there, with renewed apologies, left Mrs. Hexham and Freda. Everything had been thought of. A looking-glass was set on a

table ; there were a basin, soap, and water. Though very homely and poor, everything was clean and tidy ; and all gave evidence that very grateful and bountiful human hearts sought most earnestly to welcome the strangers. Mrs. Hexham was very touched.

When they returned to the kitchen, supper was served. Neither Terence nor his mother would sit down, but made excuses by handing this dish or that, or in changing the plates. As for the two pretty sisters, they hung bashfully in the rear. But when the tea was brought and made, Mrs. Hexham would take no excuses. She would make Terence, his mother and sisters, sit down and have a cup ; and over it came an hour's most pleasant chat. She heard first of the generous goodness of the widow's eldest son Ambrose, now far away in California. Six years previously he had worked his passage out to that country, being at the time very young and wholly destitute ; his father had died at the period of the great famine, leaving his wife and children in a condition of extreme poverty, for a heavy mortgage lay on the little patrimony he had tilled. Like most youths who emigrated to California at that date, Ambrose had gone to the gold-diggings, and there, after enduring many hardships, he made some lucky finds of nuggets, and otherwise obtained money by working for others. Portions of this he sent home from time to time ; thus enabling his mother to clear off the larger portion of the mortgage on the farm, hire labourers, send her second son Terence to college in Dublin, and give her younger children a little schooling.

But through hard and incessant work in a hot climate, Ambrose fell ill. He returned to San Francisco, and there for many weeks kept his bed. Upon recovery he found his savings dissipated by pretended friends. Poverty and hunger again stared him in the face. He at first took any work he could get ; but presently obtaining employment in a good

store, he again began to save, though it was some time before he could accumulate enough to send home, and thus he did not like to write till he could cheer his mother's heart by a sum sufficient to help her. In this interval, poverty again fell sore upon his family, and the necessity arose for poor Terence, who really loved learning for its own divine sake, to quit Dublin and return to rural labour.

Thus, through the summer just past, he had herded cattle, tended sheep, milked, and done all necessary work upon his mother's farm. But while thus labouring for daily bread, he husbanded every moment of time, and, aided by Mrs. Hexham's kindly gifts, greatly improved his knowledge in various ways. At the close of harvest, the master of the neighbouring district school, needing to go to England, had sought his aid; and thus for about two months Terence had followed the profession of schoolmaster, and this with considerable success. But ere six weeks had passed, the long-looked-for Californian letter came most unexpectedly, enclosing a bill of exchange for a large sum. Thus all present poverty was at an end, and Terence was about to renew his college life under the most happy conditions. His pretty elder sister would be shortly married, his younger brother was to go as weekly boarder to a school in a neighbouring town, while his mother, aided by two stout labourers, would carry on the business of her farm. All this good news it was pleasant to hear.

Quinlivan's death and approaching funeral were then referred to. Terence said the first thing in the morning he would make inquiries of some of his scholars as to the possibility of Mrs. Hexham and the children visiting the ruined hall, and also if old Norah and little Kathie had been seen there. Then, the travellers being tired, they departed to bed—Mrs. Hexham and Freda to the room already spoken of, and Arthur and Walter to a bed in the loft above the kitchen.

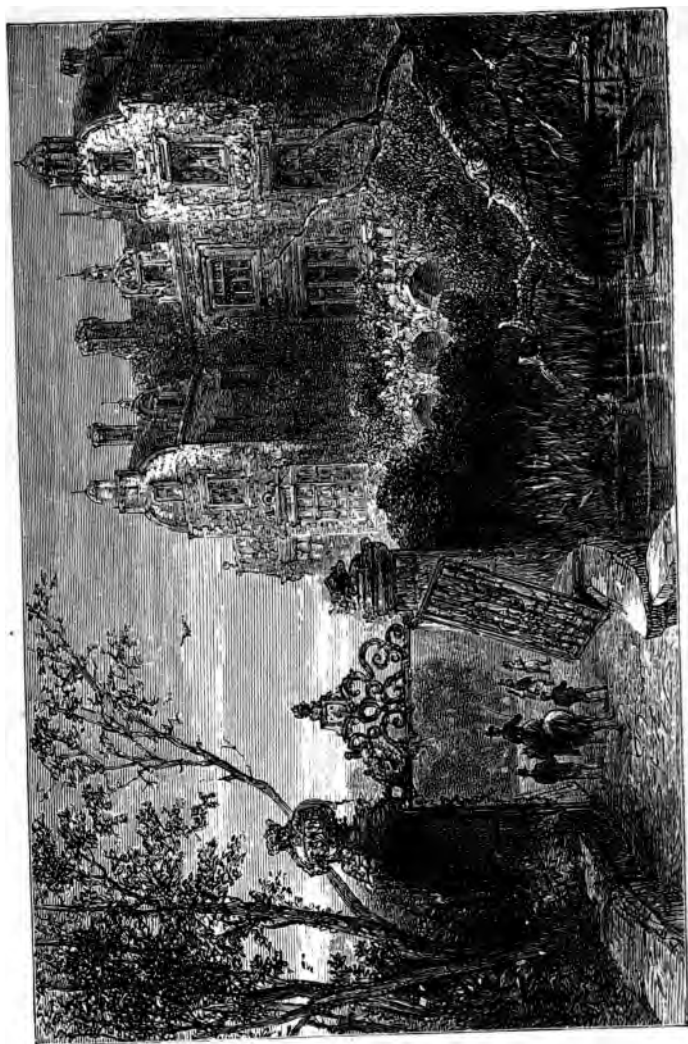
They slept till late next morning ; and when they gathered about the house-place fire, they found a dainty breakfast ready, and a most cordial welcome thereto. While partaking of this hospitable meal, a note came from Terence to say that he would be home by twelve o'clock, and ready to accompany Mrs. Hexham and the children to the ruined hall. Meanwhile she could perhaps visit the shore, which lay not far away—the general scenery around being, unlike that at Morr, of a soft and pastoral character. But thither Mrs. Hexham did not care to go, though Freda and the boys soon started off ; she wished to sketch the quaint farmhouse kitchen and the smoke-stained loft above, as also the lovely forms and features of the two Irish girls, as they flitted to and fro intent on dairy or household work.

At noon came Terence, and soon after Pat brought the ponies to the door. He was mounted, for he was to accompany his mistress ; and the children having returned and lunched, the little company started off, Terence, as he preferred, walking beside Mrs. Hexham's pony and talking as he went.

The day was another of the brief Indian summer, and its divine glory lay wide-spread over the low-lying pastoral hills. One group succeeded another, pleasant dales lying between, and these beautified by small lakes or by brooks running swift and clear. At length, reaching a wooded summit, they saw before them a wide-spread landscape, its rear stretching away towards very wild-looking solitary hills. Portions of this wide undulating strath bore traces of rude cultivation. Here and there was to be seen a cabin or a farmhouse ; and, far away from the rest, the chimneys of a country house, of apparently some pretensions, were just visible through the autumnal-tinted foliage.

Terence raised his hand and pointed to these.

"There's the ruined hall, my lady ; a beautiful place in



THE RUINED HALL.—P. 245.

the old days, but a sad one now. Quinlivan's great-grandfather and grandfather began the bad work by rioting and feasting and giving welcome to every vagabond relation that chose to claim their hospitality. The son trod in their steps, and the man who is to be buried to-day completed the ruin of the ancient place and large estate around. He mortgaged them to the last shilling, and, when this was spent, he set up a secret still in the hills beyond there, and otherwise became a vagabond and a smuggler."

Descending through broken ground into a wooded lane, they followed its incline and windings till such ended in a more open road. Here enclosures began ; but the fences and walls were all in ruin, the gates were gone, or, if any fragments remained, they hung to the hinges or else lay strewn around.

The wall which bounded the road grew still more ruinous as they proceeded : great gaps where cattle passed through were in it, or else merely a few stones which a child could climb were left. Weeds and lichens grew in the interspaces and fissures, and various-sized mounds, covered with grass and nettles, lay within and without the wall. The road widened; a fine and ruined gateway came in view, the gates of finely-wrought iron-work standing back, broken and rusty in the extreme.

What in former years had been a noble carriage-way, led from these entrance-gates to the house, some distance off, and a few scattered trees on either side showed that a fine avenue had adorned it. Wide undulating breadths of what had once been lawn lay beyond ; but these were now mere patches of meadow, disfigured by cattle grazing, by heaps of timber and stones, and by tangled masses of untrimmed shrubs. Yet, even with this utter ruin and neglect lying over them, these breadths of lawn were lovely, facing as they did a wide expanse of low-lying hills declining towards the sea,

the levels of the strath or valley, the pretty lake which lay in its hollow, and the little streams which like silver threads flowed down through green openings from the higher land. If man would have peace, it was here—and divine peace, too, for all was lovely.

Passing over the mounds and weeds about the gateway, the little company pursued the carriage-way till it ended in front of a country house of mingled styles of architecture,—one part, the oldest, being Elizabethan, another Jacobean, and a third the nondescript, half-classical style of the reign of George III. But the largest portion was of the earliest days; for picturesque stacks of chimneys, oriels, and gables were there in profusion. In spite of ruin and decay, it was a beautiful old house, and Mrs. Hexham stayed to look upwards and along its frontage with evident admiration.

Several men were about lounging and smoking, but, so soon as they caught sight of Terence and the strangers, they slunk away. The house-door stood on the latch; this Terence pushed open, and the little company entered a wainscoted hall, somewhat low in the ceiling, but otherwise of good proportions. A huge fireplace partly filled one side; a fine oak staircase, dark with time, stretched upwards; and two casemented windows towards the front, and an oriel to the rear, admitted a profusion of light. But most of the casements were destitute of glass, and thus tendrils of climbing plants and boughs of shrubs and neighbouring trees had forced their way through the leaded interspaces and wider and more broken openings. In several instances these tendrils and boughs fell far in tangled masses into the hall, or, clinging to the notches and projections of the carved wainscot, climbed far up and down, decking the walls with canopies and long-descending masses of living green. The oaken floor was strewn with heaps of withered leaves, splin-

ters of wood, fragments of glass, broken ironwork, and other signs of utter wreck and ruin.

Several doors led from this hall. Opening one, and just letting the little company see within, he closed it again quickly and gently. This glimpse, brief as it was, had given to view a large dining-hall but dimly lighted by candles, for over the ruined casements black drapery had been nailed. On a long table in the midst, and covered by a capacious pall, rested Quinlivan's coffin, a crucifix being at the head and lighted candles round it. Some women, apparently half-asleep, sat about watching, or, as it is called, "waking" the dead.

Leading the way into another ruined room, Terence said softly to Mrs. Hexham : "The Squire is to be buried this afternoon about five o'clock, in an old graveyard about a mile from here. If you can wait till then, and will follow the funeral at a distance, you may chance to see old Norah. The people about here are very cautious, and little, my lady, can be learnt from them ; but one of the lads, a tenant's son, just dropped this morning that she was at his father's house late last night. She had been there before on several occasions quite recently; and this time she had just returned, she said, from a journey to the hills. The lad supposes that she is hidden somewhere in the old house here ; and the child may be with her, for anything that is known, for the old woman was nurse to Quinlivan, and knows every nook and corner of the ruined place as few know them."

"Then, if we look carefully about, we may chance to find her?" inquired Mrs. Hexham.

"I fear not. She is very secret as to all she does, and there is need on this occasion, for the corpse has been brought here in defiance of the law, and the funeral takes place this afternoon. For the property has passed into the hands of the 'Encumbered Estates Commission,' as Quinlivan long

before his death had heavily mortgaged it. But the tenantry, who for the larger part are ignorant and turbulent, still regard it as belonging to his child. They will probably assemble in large numbers this afternoon, and therefore it will be as well to look through all the lower rooms and offices if you so wish, and then go upstairs. We can there keep quiet in some remote room till the funeral has passed, and then follow it at a distance—a considerable distance, I would counsel—for many of the ruffians who helped Quinlivan in his lawless trade will be present.”

“If such be the case,” said Mrs. Hexham, with some little concern, “how shall we get speech with the old nurse? I ought not, for the sake of these children, to run any real risk.”

“You shall not, my lady! Terence Foyle will take care of you to the life’s end. But, if you would get speech with the old woman, and effect the good work you have come so far to do, there is need of caution. Be easy, my lady; no harm shall come, be sure!”

Speaking thus, the young man led the way from room to room. Nothing could be more depressing than the ruin they beheld. In some rooms the wainscot had rotted, or else been ruthlessly torn down; mantelpieces had been removed, and grates taken out. In some were fragments of broken furniture, crockery, mingled with shreds of men’s and women’s apparel, household linen, old curtains, and other things. In corners and on ledges birds had built their nests, and the profusion of climbing plants which had thrust their branches and tendrils through the glassless window-panes and fissures and crannies of all kinds, added greatly to the air of weird desolation. And yet, in its day, each room must have been charming—looking away, as it variously did, by oriel and casement, towards hill and valley, lake and wood.

Terence led the way to the rear of the house; and here, if possible, the ruin was more extreme. What had once been

a wide extent of pleasure and kitchen garden, was now a tangled wilderness of undergrowth and weeds ; the fishponds were choked up, the roof of a great range of stabling had fallen in ; and a mighty kitchen and its offices, up the chimneys of which, as Terence quaintly said, "the fortunes of the Quinlivans had flown," were as desolate and ruined as all beside. The floors were gone, the grates were torn out, and fragments of woodwork hung rotting and dangling from hinge and nail.

Returning to the house, Terence led the way up the great staircase, and there, after looking around and listening, and thus assuring himself that all was still, he left the little company for the purpose of gaining some tidings of the old nurse at the cottages and cabins which lay near, or from the people already gathered together for the funeral. Thus left to themselves, Mrs. Hexham and the children explored the various rooms on that floor and on one above, as also sundry garrets and quaint recesses, and vast landings, which were led to by short flights of stairs. In descending one of these, they observed, in a remote and hidden-away corridor, a projection covering some space, outstanding from the wall, and still clothed with the original wainscoting. In passing this, Freda saw something on the floor, and stooping and picking it up, she knew at once, from its shape and quality, that it was a piece torn off a dress she had made for Kathie's doll. There was no mistaking this fragment, as the dress had been made from one of many rich pieces of silk Miss Haller had procured from the maids who waited on the Ladies Mary and Isabel Clare.

"Mamma," she said with delight, as she turned back and met Mrs. Hexham, "here is some sign of our dear little Kathie. She must surely be near at hand, for this is part of the dress I made for her doll not long ago."

"It is indeed," replied Mrs. Hexham. "We can have no

better sign that she is here ; so I hope our journey will not prove in vain."

As they turned from this corridor into a charming room with a deep-set oriel looking towards the small lake, and thence, through an opening in the low-lying hills, towards the sea, another sign of the child presented itself. On the floor lay a broken finger of her doll,—her favourite doll,—the one she had been nursing when last seen by Forbes in the porchway at Morr. It was thus evident that she had been in this room, and that recently.

The house was large, the rooms numerous, and thus their exploration took some time. Many were in a state of great ruin, the casements being gone, and their floors unsafe. A few were still habitable, needing only a little renovation and some furniture to restore them to their former state. But their emptiness, and the hollow echoes which followed on the footsteps of those who crossed their floors, were depressing in the extreme. All life, and signs of life, seemed to have vanished from them for ever. A few buzzing flies, a few spiders busy in their webs, a few birds twittering in the leaves outside, rather added than not to this sense of desolation. The children were far less conscious of this than Mrs. Hexham, but even they were subdued by the weird and uncanny air of all around them. The afternoon was also waning, its first shadows fell across the echoing floors, and the brightness of a day of Indian summer, which had flushed at noon, was now replaced by a misty atmosphere that, coming landward from the sea, betokened rain. Even nature for the hour wore an appearance of sympathy with the fortunes of the dead man and the utter desolation of his ruined home.

Choosing a room which by its oriel commanded the front of the house, and to the door of which there was a fastening, Mrs. Hexham and the children awaited Terence Foyle's

return. He seemed to be long away ; but he came at last, accompanied by a bare-footed girl who carried an ancient battered tray, on which was a simple meal of milk, bread and butter, and eggs. When she had departed—and this gleefully, for Mrs. Hexham rewarded her—Terence said that he had been unable to see the old nurse. She and the child were, however, somewhere in the house ; and both were likely to follow the funeral, though it was probable they would not make their appearance till it was ready to start, and a few better-class farmers and tenantry were there to protect them.

It was necessary, therefore, to wait, and partake of the meal meanwhile. There being neither chairs nor tables, the tray was placed on the floor, and the little company sat round in picnic fashion, Terence keeping watch by the ruined oriel for the first signs of the funeral procession leaving the house. A motley crowd of ragged men, women and children had gradually assembled about the main entrance. At the rear of this were men and boys mounted on sorry-looking horses and ponies, fresh arrivals every few minutes augmenting their number ; and now, as the afternoon deepened still more into shadow, a few better-class farmers and peasants rode up, and dismounting, made their way through the thick of the crowd, and passed into the hall. Soon after this, a great wail of women's voices sent its echoes through the ruined place, followed by the chant of a religious service. To this succeeded the buzz of many tongues and the echo of many feet ; and then the funeral procession passed forth,—the priest and some assistants, the bier borne by a number of defiant-looking men, followed by farmers, peasants, and the motley crowd. But neither before nor after the bier was to be seen old Norah or Quinlivan's child.

"The tenants tell me, my lady," said Terence, "that old Norah is in dread of those smuggler-men. They want to

take the child back to the hills and bring her up as one among them."

"God forbid!" replied Mrs. Hexham; "I have come far for the purpose, and I hope to rescue her."

"I hope you will. It may just be that the old woman, fearing the men, may not join the procession till it reaches the churchyard."

The funeral wound its way round the hillocks and tree-stumps of the ruined avenue, and then, turning into the highway, was soon lost to view. As soon as this was the case, and the last stragglers out of sight, the little company, led by Terence, left the hall and followed at a distance—just keeping the tail of the procession in view, and no more. Indeed, upon reaching the highway, Terence turned into a path leading through a wood—this in a while descending to the shores of the lake which helped to form so sweet a picture as seen from the casements and oriel windows of the ruined house. From the lake the procession entered the hollows lying between the low hills facing the sea, and, when seen again, it was partly gathered in a solitary graveyard, round which at intervals remained the fragments of a low and ruined wall. A little church or chapel, whichever it was, was in ruins too; and the whole had the weather-beaten, storm-frayed look which all places have when standing high and unsheltered towards the sea. Except for the presence of those temporarily gathered at the funeral, nothing could be more solitary than the scene; the overcast sky deepening by its shadows the descending eve, and the fine red lights of the sun as it set across the western sea being seen but partially. Here and there these lights reached the tops of the neighbouring hills, and in greater sombreness were spread partially over the churchyard and its funeral throng.

The more ruffianly class of followers stood without those

portions of the wall nearest the chapel. To avoid them, Terence led his little company round the foot of a hill, and then to a spot where the wall was highest and no one near. Here they took their place and waited patiently. Presently the crowd parted, and the coffin was borne towards the grave. The priests led the way, and then following came old Norah leading little Kathie. Both were dressed in black; the old nurse in a long cloak, with a black shawl about her head. When the service was over, and the coffin about to be lowered into the grave, the old woman led the child forward as though to look within, but she hung back terrified and screaming. Norah stooped and soothed her, then led her a little way apart. Here her screams ceased for some minutes, and then recommenced more loudly; but the cause was unknown to those who watched, for the business of the funeral was over, except so far as filling in the grave, and the great crowd intermingling, began to move away. Kathie and her nurse were thus lost to sight.

"I think you had better leave us here, and try to gain speech with the old woman, Mr. Foyle," said Mrs. Hexham. "If you lose sight of her, all the trouble of our journey may be in vain."

"I will. But keep quiet here, my lady, till I return: those blackguard smugglers you see mixed in the crowd might give you bad words, or be questioning you as to what you did here. It might be worse, for you see many of their holes and lurking-places have been stopped up or destroyed by the coastguard, and they have light purses and nothing to do."

"They should turn to honest callings and work," replied Mrs. Hexham.

Terence only shook his head and went his way. Swiftly following the moving crowd, which had now entirely left the churchyard, and was entering the hollows of

the low hills that descended towards the lake, he soon understood the cause of the child's screams. Several men mounted on ponies, with a few others on foot, were vainly endeavouring to get near her; for she had been lifted up, and was now seated in front of a farmer-like man, whose appearance was respectable and his horse good. Several others as respectable and well mounted had come to his assistance, and now there was great vociferating and commotion throughout the crowd.

"By the faith, it's the Squireen's child, and we'll have her. The old mourvreen and she will be safe and happy enough wid us," bawled some one.

"I won't go," screamed Kathie, who heard what was said; "I will go to my dear mamma, and little mourvreen, Arthur and Walter."

"Yes, you shall if you'll sit still and not be frightened any more, Kathie." And the farmer kissed the little child and put his coat about her tenderly. • He saw that a regular fight was about to ensue between those anxious to gain possession of their former landlord's child and those who were old Norah's friends. Moving his horse rapidly aside so as to make sudden way through the crowd, he put spurs to it and galloped off; several of his friends following so soon as they could free themselves in a like manner. As soon as this was seen, that portion of Quinlivan's men who were mounted followed also; though from prudence, or some other reason, they did not proceed far, but, halting when they reached the lake, they stopped, took counsel together, then passed on, and were soon lost to view in the shadows of early night. Numerous stragglers were thus left behind, and among them was old Norah. Terence, who had followed the crowd, now came up and touched her on the shoulder. As soon as she saw him she covertly held up her finger as though in warning, and then continued excitedly talking in

her own tongue to those around her. The greater number were women, though interspersed were a few wild-looking men. Terence, resolving to gain his point and have speech with her, patiently kept with the crowd as it moved on. Of this the old woman seemed presently aware, for, when a bend in the road scattered those around her, and for a moment or two divided the men from the women, she stopped and bent her ear.

"Mrs. Hexham has come for Kathie," he whispered ; "she waits to speak to you behind the highest part of the churchyard wall."

"I knew she was here," she answered,—*"the dear lady ! the good mother to the orphan child ! Quinlivan's fellows want her, to bring her up as one of themselves. They shan't. Take the lady to Mr. O'Keeffe's house, and let her wait till I send. Have neither firelight nor candle-light in the hall."* She then pressed his hand in token of silence, and went swiftly on.

Returning to the now solitary churchyard, Terence brought Mrs. Hexham and the children back to the neighbourhood of the hall ; and here, in a substantial farmhouse, they found a kindly welcome. A meal had been prepared, and a bright turf fire burnt on the hearth, but no men were visible, and only a couple of women, apparently servants, came out and in to mend the fire or serve the table. Mrs. Hexham and the children were glad to sit by the blaze and rest, for they were weary ; for the churchyard lying high, the wind had blown damp and chill from the sea.

It was well the little company had this place of shelter, for it was quite nine o'clock before old Norah's summons came. It was brought by a woman, who, as soon as she had delivered it, went her way.

The message was to Terence. He was to lead Mrs. Hexham, and only her, to the hall, pass the front doorway

listen, and, if all was still, go up the staircase, and then through a certain suite of rooms to a side gallery or passage. Here Norah would come to them ; but they were to carry no light, and refrain from talking.

Setting off at once, they soon reached the hall ; and, hearing various loud voices in one or more of the lower rooms, they went silently and swiftly up the broad staircase. All was intensely still, and, opening and shutting each door very gently, Terence soon brought Mrs. Hexham to the place appointed. Here they waited for some minutes in total darkness ; then a noise like the sliding of a shutter or a door was heard, a light came gradually into view, and old Norah was seen standing on the lower step of a short staircase, formed within the very baulk or projection Mrs. Hexham and the children had noticed that morning. The old woman held the light forward, beckoned to them in silence, and when they had passed up the little staircase, she closed and carefully fastened the sliding door behind her. She then followed, shading the candle, and Mrs. Hexham and Terence saw that they stood in one of those secret chambers common in houses of an early date ; for this now ruined hall of Quinlivan's ancient race was rather the work of several generations, each of which had added its share, than of one—though the older portions were by far the largest.

Little Kathie was safely there, lying fast asleep on a bed, which apparently had been hastily made on the floor with articles borrowed from some neighbouring farm or cabin. The old doll she had brought from Morr was in her arms, and her childish face looked lovely as it rested on the pillow.

"She sleeps deeply," said Mrs. Hexham, who had approached the bed, while Norah shaded the candle.

"I fetched her from the hills last night, and so she is weary ; and to-day she has been frightened by the men her

father made companions. They think she has no better friends, and want to bring her up among them, though they are but vagabonds whom every honest man shuns." Norah said all this to Terence, and he in turn interpreted the words in good English to Mrs. Hexham.

"You were not the one, surely, who took her away from Morr?" asked the lady.

"My lady! no," replied the old nurse earnestly; "no; why should I? Was it right to take a tender fledgling from the nest which well suited it? But her father was shot by the coastguard, and only escaped by the skill of some of his men, who hid him away in a place they had artfully formed with great labour in some rocks above the great cave. At his request (for he knew he was dying) the child was laid in wait for, and, when secured, was borne to where he lay, and only just in time for him to give her a parting kiss. I had been fetched, and so had a good priest—the Virgin be praised!—but I was sorry to see her there, for she did not love her father; he had been so often long away, and was almost always so rough and unkind to her, the pretty flower! She cried night and day to go back to Morr, and still cries."

"And we need her, too," said Mrs. Hexham; "and this is why I have come so far, and at this late season, to fetch her."

"My lady, my heart is grateful. Her father in dying whispered to me not to let her stay among his men; so, as soon as he was dead, I sent her away by trusty hands to the hills, where I had friends, and I only fetched her thence last night. The men have nearly had a fight for her to-day, and would forcibly search the houses for her to-night, but that Mr. O'Keeffe and other of the tenants rode away to the nearest town to fetch the police, and, with their help, are now keeping guard for a mile or so around. As

the pretty flower might not have been safe in either farmhouse or cabin, I brought her here to this hidden room, the secret of which I had learnt years ago, when I nursed Quinlivan, and before the family fortunes had sunk so low."

"There would be danger in removing her to-night?" asked Terence.

"Yes, the greatest! and she, sweet bird, is so weary! The men who are drinking below have no idea she is here; they think that she is hidden in some of the farms or cabins around. If we moved her, and she cried, they would know her voice in a moment; and, as they are the worst of Quinlivan's fellows, and are stopping the night here in the hope of seizing her to-morrow, they would be upon us at once, and there might be bloodshed."

"Why do not the tenants—men like Mr. O'Keeffe—and the police interfere?" asked Terence.

"You see," replied the old woman, "Quinlivan was but buried to-day, and the old ruined place has become a sort of no man's land. Besides, the child has still some inheritance in it; and though the good people in Dublin have taken it in their hands, and all the estate beside, and it will be sold, more than half of the old tenants still think the place Quinlivan's, and would be sure to make a fight of it if the police interfered. So it has been thought best to let the fellows drink and sing for the night, in the hope that they will go back in peace to the hills in the morning, as no doubt they will when they find they have no chance of carrying off the child."

"Then if we cannot take her to-night, how are we to have her? I am anxious to be back at Morr by to-morrow evening," said Mrs. Hexham to Terence, and begging him, in translating this to Norah, to impress the point strongly.

"The darling! she will be awake early," Norah replied.

Then she put a question, and said, "Do you, my lady, go back to the Widow Foyle's to-night?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Hexham; "and we start for the Grange early in the morning."

"The child shall be with you betimes. Her heart will be overjoyed. But you must take another way home, and I will go part of it with you."

"Is it shorter?" asked Terence; for, from what Sullivan and little Pat had told him, he felt sure that Mrs. Hexham and the children had been taken some miles out of the way.

"Much. And I need to go to my cabin in the hills: there is a box there which belongs to the child, and which Quinlivan entrusted to my care just before he went last to Spain. In it are some papers which may be of value to her, and some things which belonged to the beautiful young lady, her mother, who died when she was born."

Terence interpreted this; and in reply Mrs. Hexham asked if Kathie had any relations, and if so, who and where they were.

"But for two relations, my lady, the darling is alone in the world. There's an old uncle of her mother's living far away in the county Donegal—a rich man, but a miserly man, and one who cares for nobody. And there's her mother's sister—a lady named Mistress Grattan (Kathie calls her 'Aunt Agnes'); but she's now gone back to India with her husband, who is an officer serving there. They came back to Ireland for their health for a time, bringing five wild children with them. Kathie went twice to see this aunt and cousins; but though the lady was kind, the children were too rude for her liking, and she was always crying to go back to the 'old mourvreen,' as she calls me. This was before she went to Morr; but now, the darling, her cry is for the lady, and the 'little mourvreen,' and Arthur, and Walter, and others."

"Indeed! I am very glad to find she loves us so. Then

I may take her and regard her as my own? The Ladies Clare and Dr. Marlow will be happy, I am sure, to help me in any way."

"She has no other friend, my lady—none to bring her up as she ought to be. And you've her father's word for it, too. For he had never known of the bad fever she had, nor how the clever doctor had saved her life. But after Quinlivan was shot, and he sent for me, I told him all about her illness, and how since then she had been at Morr. As things were, he would not send for her, so he put on two of his men to take her away for a little while. 'But let her go back, mourvreen,' he said, 'when I am dead. The lady will continue to be good to her, I am sure, though her father was a smuggler and a ruined and an outlawed man. Give the lady the box I left with you, mourvreen, a while ago: there are things in it that may be useful to the child by-and-by.' This is what he said to me just before the men brought the child to the cave; and no great while after he died. I then took her away to my cabin in the hills, and only brought her here last night so that she might follow with me her father to his grave. But sorrowful he would have been had he seen her fright, and how his drunken worthless fellows fought and strove to bear her off."

An anxious thought crossed Mrs. Hexham's mind, and she said to Terence, "Just tell old Norah that if she walks to-morrow, and we ride, our pace must necessarily be very slow—too slow, if we are to reach Morr by nightfall."

"I've thought of all that, my lady," she replied as anxiously, "and Mr. O'Keeffe is to help us. I and the little child will steal out from here in the early morning, and have a meal at his house, and then he will put us in his car and drive us to Laragh. Then if you, my lady, and the sweet young things be ready, we can go on at once. I don't mean to say, my lady, that I will ride with the likes of you; but

Mr. O'Keeffe says the Widow Foyle can lend us a pillion, and I can go behind Pat to the hills, where I shall leave you. Sullivan the guide can follow with the ponies, and this way you'll reach the Grange in good time."

"Will you go with us, Norah? Now Quinlivan's dead, to whose fortunes and child you have been so faithful, you might find some place of rest near us. The Ladies Clare would, I am sure, be very kind and assist you."

"Thank you, my lady," was the grateful and ready answer; "I will, with your leave and that of the Doctor, take a day's journey now and then to see the child, but for the rest she's best without me. It's well for me and all concerned that Quinlivan's gone at last. I'm weary of tramping about the country like a beggar and a witch, living in caves and holes as a bat or a toad, for the reason that he had no motherly woman to care for him and his. I had nursed him at my breast, had known him in his days of better deeds; and I and mine had lived under the roof or on the land of his ancient race for generations. This is the reason, my lady, of my being a wandering beggar."

Mrs. Hexham as quickly replied: "You shall always have a welcome at the Grange, Norah, though I think with you that the more thoroughly and quickly we wean the child from old associations, the better. It will be pleasant to me, Norah, to think you have a home."

"Yes, lady. I and an old sister live together in a cabin; we are both widows, and both have good boys in a far part of America who remember our old age and loneliness, and send us a trifle now and then. We sell eggs and poultry, and sometimes a bit of butter, for my sister bought a cow with some of the boys' money, and we add a pig when we can. The men that travel after such things buy of us, and so we manage to live. My sister will be glad for me to rest and be with her; she's never liked my wanderings with

Quinlivan, or the poverty and disgrace his bad deeds and troubles brought me to."

"All this is good to hear, Norah, and much better than I thought or expected. Now Mr. Foyle and I must go, for there is our ride to Laragh. We will be sure to be ready, and hope to see our Kathie in the morning. Good-night, Nora ! Good-night, darling !" Mrs. Hexham pressed money into the old nurse's hand as she spoke, and stooped and kissed the child very softly ; not so softly but that Kathie stirred on her pillow and murmured something about Arthur and her doll. It was very evident that her dreams related to Morr, and to all she loved there.

Nora lighted her visitors down to the ancient corridor, then quickly closed the door, and all was still. No one was present in the hall below, though the strong fumes of tobacco, and the intermingled sounds of loud talking and incoherent songs, gave evidence that the most dissipated of the dead man's followers still held their unseemly revels in his ruined home.

Upon reaching the farmhouse near at hand, Mrs. Hexham found the children asleep upon a sort of settle or great chair beside the fire ; while O'Keeffe, having returned from his watch, sat smoking his pipe close by. He proved to be the decent-looking farmer on whose saddle Kathie had ridden on her return from her father's funeral. He said his car stood ready in a rickyard not far off, as he did not dare to bring it too near the house; and, if Mrs. Hexham and the children would go with him through his orchard, they could mount, and he would drive them quickly to Laragh. The children were therefore roused, and when they had gladly heard that their dear little Irish Kathie would be with them early in the morning, and return with them to Morr, they followed the farmer to his rickyard, with Mrs. Hexham and Terence, and were soon on their way to Laragh. Arrived there,

they were glad to go at once to bed, for they were very tired.

As though in sign of the child's happier fortunes, and her return to her home of peace and love at Morr, another morn of Indian summer shone down upon the pretty valley where Laragh lay. Breakfast was ready by seven ; but the children could scarcely sit to eat it, varying their despatch of eggs and bread and butter, and curd and other dainties, in running to the door to watch for Kathie. Presently the car could be seen on the ridge of the nearest hill, then it came sweeping down the road, and then it stayed. Another moment, and Terence had lifted her down ; and yet another, and she was gathered partly in Mrs. Hexham's and partly in Freda's arms. She looked so sweet and innocent in her little mourning frock, her tippet, and black straw hat. These garments were but poor—such as the needy would buy in a remote country shop far away from towns—but round her neck was a choice string of real pearls, from which hung a cross fashioned of the same, and richly set in gold. Mrs. Hexham's eye at once fell upon this lovely ornament ; but the child was all unconscious of it or any other thing : she was back with those she had learnt to love, and the intensity of her joy was betokened by her broken utterance, which was as much a sob of grief as a cry of joy.

“ My lady—mamma, my little mourvreen, my Arthur, my Walter, my——”

She was proceeding with all the other names of those she loved at Morr, but, looking round and missing them, she stayed.

Mrs. Hexham understood her meaning in a moment, and stooped in tenderness again.

“ They are not here, my darling, but at Morr, waiting for their little Kathie. Iole, and Lucy, and Harold, and Forbes, and Milly, and even Denis, so want their little girl ! Only

Arthur and Walter and Freda are here. See, here's Arthur ! He as much wants his little Kathie to play with as Kathie wants him."

She looked round with smiles, and then extending her arms, showed her preference for him who had always been so very good to her. Arthur lifted her up, and she put them about his neck.

"The doll ! the doll ! Sophy, the doll, is gone !" she began to cry.

Norah explained that on the road to Laragh, on the brow of the first hill, Kathie, in her eagerness to see if the children were yet in sight, dropped her doll over the side of the car. In a moment the wheel went over it, and it was smashed into atoms. Her grief was great, and it was with difficulty O'Keeffe and the nurse could still her cries.

"Oh, don't cry !" replied Arthur ; "an old doll like that ugly thing isn't worth crying for. There are plenty of such Mollies at Morr."

"It wasn't a Molly ! It was a beautiful dear ! It made me happy when I hadn't mamma, or my little mourvreen, or *you*." She laid an unconscious emphasis on the last pronoun, and rested her face on Arthur's shoulder.

"You shall have a new doll, Kathie," said Mrs. Hexham,— "as pretty as Sophy, if I send to England for it."

"It won't be Sophy ; it *can't* be Sophy." And she began to weep more sadly.

"Whisht, whisht !" said her nurse : "Kathie is to have Snap and Jessy ; they are to go to old Shavy at Morr."

"And Kathie shall have a pretty chick," said Mrs. Foyle, who stood hard by. "The little gentlemine and the little lady admired me hens and me cocks ; and shure, ain't I grateful for the good they did me boy, me Terence ? I've packed up one for each in a basket, and Kathie's is the prettiest, with white feathers and a tuft on its head." The widow spoke

truly, for close by the gate, ready packed for travel, stood a coarse wicker basket, in which were seven of the prettiest little chicks ever seen.

"Oh the beautiful birdies, and Snap, and Jessy, and Shavy!" exclaimed the child. In another moment, with the happy inconstancy of childhood, her grief was forgotten, and Freda taking her into her arms from those of Arthur, they all went within the house.

As they did so, Mrs. Hexham said in an undertone to Terence, "Ask Norah why the child has on that lovely ornament. I do not like simple childhood to be so adorned. It is a jewel above Kathie's fortunes; and, even were it not, it is not fit to be worn on a rough journey over hills."

Terence obeyed, and interpreted the answer. "It is put on, dear lady, as a sweet sign of this good day, as a greeting to you, as a token that what was bad for the child is gone, and what is holy begun. The necklet and cross belonged to the child's mother, and she wore them on her wedding day. Evil in most other things, Quinlivan loved his young wife tenderly—she not knowing, till after she had married, the bad life he had begun and was carrying on. At her death he preserved most things which had belonged to her; and this necklet and cross, because she had worn them on her marriage day, he always carried about with him in this case which I have here. No, my lady, it is no meaning of vain-glory, or decking out Kathie above her fortunes, but just to honour you and the sweet day that takes her back to Morr." And as she spoke, the old woman brought forth a much worn leather case from her pocket, and following the child and taking the ornaments from her neck, placed them within, and delivered it over to Mrs. Hexham, who at once deposited it safely in an inner pocket.

"Be sure, Nora," she said, "I respect your grateful and tender feelings. I will take the greatest care of all which is

entrusted to me, and Kathie shall always wear her pretty ornaments for a little while on her birthday or other festive occasion."

Pat now rode up on Jove, and Sullivan, riding a pony, followed with the rest. A side-saddle was borrowed, and old Nora took her place behind Pat; and the children, eager to be off, mounted the car,—but not till Kathie had had food, which she could scarcely eat for joy, and been well wrapped up in one of Mrs. Hexham's warm coverings.

Then Mr. O'Keeffe and Sullivan and old Norah had a parting sip of whiskey, and the basket of chicks, with another full of simple dainties for the children to eat by the way, were placed in front of the car. While this business went on, Mrs. Hexham said her last words to Mrs. Foyle and her good children. The widow would take no reward, and seemed hurt at it being offered; but the girls coyly accepted a present each to buy them a new gown, and Terence was asked to the Grange whenever he was home from Dublin and had a holiday—Mrs. Hexham promising to speak to Dr. Marlow in his behalf, as that gentleman might know some of the University professors, or be otherwise able to help him.

At last, amidst warm Irish blessings, and eyes more or less wet with tears, the little cavalcade took its way to the hills, avoiding those great stretches of heath and bog amid which Sullivan had wandered so needlessly two nights before. As they advanced, the scenery became most wild and lonely—one bare mountain succeeding another, and each one as it followed appearing to be loftier than the last. The way for the most part led up by narrow gorges or valleys, many of them dark with shadows, and all more or less steep. In one of these—the wildest and loneliest yet seen—Mr. O'Keeffe, bending his head and speaking in a low voice to Mrs. Hexham, said,—

"In one of the windings of this valley, up there to the right, if you look," and he pointed with his whip, "the little

child's father had his largest still for making whiskey. There are said to be others about the country, though where they are is not known. But the one here was broken up by the police and coastguard a few weeks ago, and no doubt it will now be watched, so that it may not be patched up and re-worked. The large part of the fellows who struggled for the child yesterday, and were sotting in the hall last night, used to live here, but their women and children are now removed to other places amid the hills. It was to companions such as these the fellows wished to take the child,—with good-natured meaning, no doubt, for they were all attached, very much attached, to Quinlivan,—but to her sorrow and ruin had their wishes prospered."

"Yes, indeed!" said Mrs. Hexham earnestly; "and this was what I thought. I only hope there will be no further attempt to take her away."

"Oh, I think not. They will soon understand that the child has powerful friends. Still, I should say care ought to be taken for a time, till the vigilance of the coastguard and the police together have forced these fellows to leave this part of the country or take to more honest callings."

About a mile further ahead, where the gorge was wider, and the hillsides very steep, Mrs. Hexham observed that, in parts where these had been dug away, a most beautiful coralline coloured clay was laid open to view; and a little way further on, where a narrow road ran zigzag up the hill, a man was digging it out and loading two panniers borne by an ass that browsed patiently hard by.

The car was proceeding slowly up the steep, so that Mrs. Hexham, observing him and his occupation, said,—

"I suppose that is the potter who, I hear, lives in these parts?"

"Yes; he makes his pots and pans at a place about three miles from here, across the bog. He and his lads work all

the winter, and then hawk their goods through the west and north of Ireland during the summer. He is now digging clay to prepare for his pots. It is nearly all red clay about here, or else black, which burns red."

"Is there no white, or at least greyish-white?" Mrs. Hexham asked. "I want some, and for a particular purpose. If I could obtain it, it would save me sending to England, or at least to Dublin."

"I will shout, my lady, and ask him. But I must speak slowly, for his English may be imperfect. He and his lads are half savages, though the younger now go to school and get a little education." So saying, O'Keeffe shouted to the potter, who after a while rested slowly on his spade and listened.

O'Keeffe asked if there were any white clays in that neighbourhood.

The potter shook his head.

"Do you ever use any?"

"My lad does, sometimes," was the answer.

"Where does he get them from?"

"A good bit from here."

"Where? This lady wants some for use. She lives at Morr. Is there any in that direction?"

"The best in old Ireland. It is granite worn down by the sea in days long ago." Then, as though he wished to say no more, he turned away and stolidly resumed his digging.

"These potters," said O'Keeffe, "are, like many other craftsmen, very secret as to where they get the materials for their work. Be sure we should learn no more if we questioned him all day."

"At any rate, it is something to have learnt that there are good clays about Morr. I will speak to Dr. Marlow; I may be able to get a sufficient quantity from Dublin to last the winter. As soon as spring is here, I mean to ride this way

and see the man and his lads ; there is one, I hear, who often does remarkable work."

"I shall be happy, my lady, to be your guide, if you'll give me a few days' previous warning. The places among these hills are often difficult to find."

"Thank you : I will remember your promise."

An hour's further riding brought the little company to the top of a low hill, which spread itself out widely. It was perfectly bare of shrubs or trees, and the edges rising more or less all round, formed a sort of deep saucer, thickly covered with the finest turf. From the midst, and for some way round, nothing could be seen but the blue sky ; and in this midst was a little cabin, a fine bubbling spring of water, a shed or two, and a strip of garden ; a cow and a pony were grazing near, and a multitude of fowls had this paradise to themselves. Nothing could be more intensely solitary than this mountain-top, shut in, as it were, by the clear blue sky.

As the travellers crossed this hollow to the cabin, Kathie recognised everything before her. A sheep-dog came running towards the car ; and at the words "Snap," and "Jessy," two little goats separated themselves from some others browsing not far off, and bounded forward. Then she had a call for some of the cocks and hens ; and when an old woman, much in appearance like Norah, came to the cabin door, shading her eyes from the sun in order to see who it was approached, the child cried out, "That's my other old mourvreen—my mourvreen Dana,"—her name, as presently explained, being Diana.

Old Dana showed pleasure at her sister's return, and after many curtsies to Mrs. Hexham, she went within the cabin and brought forth newly-baked cakes and milk for the children's refreshment. Meanwhile, the latter had alighted to view the place ; and the boys were soon helping Pat to

tether the two goats together, and tie a long string thereto for Sullivan to hold till their home was out of sight. Then they would be unfastened, and so follow the ponies very docilely ; but as it was not likely that they could run so fast as the car, it was presently settled that Pat and Sullivan should journey more slowly after.

Old Norah had disappeared for some minutes, but now returned from the cabin bringing with her a deal box about a foot and a half long by a foot wide ; and, placing it in the car, asked O'Keeffe, who stood close by giving water to his horse, to interpret what she said to Mrs. Hexham. This was to the effect that the box contained various legal papers which might be useful to the child, if the "clever Dochter" at Morr would look them through. It also held her mother's watch, ornaments, some lace and other things, a lock each of her parents' hair, and their miniatures, as also those of several of her father's family.

Mrs. Hexham replied, and O'Keeffe interpreted, that every care should be taken of what was entrusted to her, and that, succouring little Irish Kathie as she was about to do, all means of securing any little income from out the ruin of her father's estate should be taken.

Old Dana was rewarded for her kindness to the children. They then mounted the car, which drove slowly away to the opposite edge of the mountain, from whence descended a narrow zigzag road into the valley below. From this height they could see through the gorges of the hills the rocky shore about Morr, and somewhat of the terrible solitude of rock and shore which lay beyond.

Here old Norah embraced the little child very tenderly, and then quickly moved out of sight, for she feared if Kathie saw her tears she would want to return. Even as it was, the child put out her hands entreatingly, and tears filled her eyes ; but Mrs. Hexham told her the old mourvreen would soon be

coming to Morr to see her darling, and Arthur made a place for her on the seat beside him. Thus the shadows from her face soon vanished, and presently she was chattering about the goats and the new doll Mrs. Hexham had promised her. But Norah was not so soon or so easily comforted. Presently she returned to the edge of the green hill-top and watched the car till it could be seen no longer. Then, still weeping bitterly, like Naomi for her children, she turned towards the cabin and her humble duties there.

The route being so much shorter, and O'Keeffe's horse swift and strong, the little company reached Morr in good time ; Miss Haller being there to welcome them, and many English letters and papers awaiting Mrs. Hexham. Towards evening the latter returned with Miss Haller to the castle, and the children had some time to themselves. This was mainly occupied by the arrival of Snap and Jessy, and their introduction to old Shavy, who very prettily recognised them and licked them all over with great tenderness, and in the unpacking of the little chicks, and the fastening of a tiny parchment ring round the neck of each, so that each child might know its own.

The days of the Indian summer ended with that of their return, and there were ominous signs that the weather was breaking up and winter at hand. Mrs. Hexham, therefore, resolved to return to the coastguardsmen's hut without further delay. In a week or ten days she could finish her sketches, and then she could leave those dreary solitudes to themselves till summer came again, and sea and rock and shore and moor were gladdened anew by the divine light of the sun. At first she hesitated to take Freda, Arthur, and Walter ; but they pleaded so strenuously to go, and reminded her of her long promise, that she at length consented, though not till the three had passed their word that they would keep in the care of the coastguardsmen, and obey their orders.

The journey was more than commonly long and weary, owing to the direction and force of the wind and the immense clouds of spray, thus necessitating a divergence far inland; but just in the fall of evening they all reached the hut, to find a fine glowing fire and a good meal awaiting them. The boys slept in another hut, and Freda with Mrs. Hexham. Had the children been less tired and sleepy than they were, the mighty roar of both wind and sea would have kept them awake, for the sound was deafening and indescribable. A million giants might have been blowing the hugest trumpets, a myriad soldiers firing their greatest cannons, the Titans might have been warring with the giants, and yet those horrid noises blended in one would have been nothing compared with this fierce battle of the mighty elements. But, like happy children, they slept well.

The morrow was a little fairer, the sea smoother, the wind less high; so, as soon as the early breakfast was over, they all set forth. They took the way to "Timber Cove," for Mrs. Hexham had some half-dozen sketches to finish of that extraordinary spot. They were not more than half an hour in reaching it, for it lay at no great distance. But its condition was very different to when seen by the children on that lovely summer's afternoon. Now the breakers stalked like mighty giants from sea to cove, filled it, covered the surrounding rocks, and then, piling themselves one upon another in indescribable confusion, fell far inland in avalanches of foam and water upon the mounds of wreckage. It was therefore inland that they had to steer their course; to parts where the timber had whitened and rotted for years, where sand and shells and seaweed lay shelved in masses, as also many other signs and tokens of the sea.

Mrs. Hexham, by the aid of the coastguard, soon settled herself on part of the hull of a mighty Indiaman that had gone down in the great deep nigh a century before, and

resumed her work, moving to several distant points of the great mass during that and the subsequent day. The children were thus free to go with the men, who were well acquainted with the vast pile of timber.

After some little wandering, they all at once heard a great crash, mingled with cries and yells; and, running forward, saw that some beams had fallen and unsettled a large mass on the top of the mound. This rocked for some minutes to and fro, and seemed about to fall also. Gaining a sort of wide recess, and looking up and down, the coastguard perceived that this fall of timber had been caused by eight or more nearly naked lads who had been pulling at the beams, both from above and below. It seemed wonderful that the latter had not been killed outright; but, at any rate, a few had been badly hurt, for they stood stooping, and groaning, and wringing their hands. No sooner, however, did they catch sight of the coastguard than they fled—those injured screaming and limping as they went. Those on the crown of the stack disappeared almost instantly in the fissures and holes formed by overlying planks and broken fragments of timber; and the others almost as speedily, as they knew unlimited hiding-places in the great pile.

As soon as the clouds, formed of fine dry sand and minute shells, had cleared off, the coastguardsmen entered the recess and looked about them. The pile in its highest part was at least fifty feet high, and the mass which had fallen was considerable. Just above this was seen a small chest of drawers and various huge trunks and cases, several of the latter being much decayed, and battered or else partially staved in.

"This is a specimen of these lawless urchins' daily occupation," said Benwell angrily. "We are always finding them here, come when we may. Whenever or wherever they can, they throw the timber over to find if anything fit for plunder lies behind or beneath. Sometimes they come

upon good finds, there is no doubt ; and, if portable, such are carried away to Dublin, Limerick, or even to Liverpool, and sold. But occasionally they get maimed for life, or, as it sometimes happens, are killed outright. A few years ago two men and three boys were crushed in this way."

Speaking thus, Benwell climbed the new face of the pile, and, reaching up, tried to open the drawers ; but the chest was made of stout mahogany, and these drawers being locked, and having moreover a huge weight pressing down upon them, did not yield. They were, however, much battered and worm-eaten in places.

"If I don't open them, those savages will," spoke Benwell to one of his comrades. "Find me a sharp stone : the wood is rotten, and I can soon force the locks." The man obeyed, and with the others climbed up to lend assistance. The boys climbed too, and Freda waited below as near as she could. All three were deeply interested.

There were but three drawers, and these were speedily opened. It was evident that originally they had been chiefly filled with rich articles of ladies' and children's dress, for many fragments remained, still showing fine traces of colour and elaborate needlework. There was a small dolls' house, but that fell into fragments as soon as exposed to the air. There were several small boxes, and a parcel sewn up in linen and cotton-wool. This last was examined first, and soon was seen an exquisitely-shaped casket or box of Battersea enamel, eight inches and a half long by seven inches and a half wide, the corners rounded off, and the two longer sides curved slightly inwards. It was beautifully painted, and the handle on the lid and the lock-plate were works of tasteful art ; but it was locked.

"I mustn't smash this lovely thing," said Benwell, "for it is as new and fresh as though painted yesterday. I wonder what its story is, and what it holds ? Well, it's a pretty

thing, and fit for a young lady ; so I'll give it to you, Miss Freda, for no doubt when Mrs. Hexham gets back to the Grange, she will soon find a key to fit it. One thing only I must say : that if it contains coins, they must be given up to our governor, Captain Fairholt, for they belong to our Sovereign Lady the Queen." Thus speaking, Benwell handed the beautiful casket to Freda, who covered it again with its old wraps, so that Mrs. Hexham might see it as it was originally found.

One of the boxes contained fragments of many old-fashioned toys ; a second, an exquisite toy dinner service of Wedgwood cream ware, beautifully painted with a Greek pattern in black and red ; a third, a toy dessert service, richly enamelled with flowers ; and, loveliest of all, a fourth contained a toy tea service in Wedgwood's jasper ware, the colour being a fine pale blue, with figures in white relief upon it.

" Pretty things these for savages !" exclaimed Benwell.

" Mrs. Hexham is so fond of this beautiful ware, that I am sure she will buy it if you will sell," said Arthur.

" Well, if the lady will give me and the men a trifle, we'll be content. We'll take them all home to the hut."

The drawers contained nothing more than some rusty articles in steel, a few coins, and innumerable fragments of clothes. From these last, while the men and Arthur and Walter were busy searching the battered chests, Freda picked out a few pieces of gold thread and lace, and little strips and fragments of unfaded stuff, chintz, and silk. The chests held nothing ; time and sea-water had ruined their contents years before.

At length they left the recess, and wandered about the Cove in all directions, both on that and the succeeding day, without finding more than a footstool and a cabin-chair or two. These were all more or less broken ; but the boys took them to the hut for the purpose of transport to Morr,

and, when mended, for use in their future Robinson Crusoe home. Many portions of the great piles of timber were strangely picturesque and wild ; fragments of great ships lying in chaos together like so many fragments of things belonging to an antique world.

Her sketches finished of "Timber Cove," Mrs. Hexham spent three successive days on the rocks surrounding the "Devil's Net." Here the children were not suffered to venture ; the sea sweeping in so awfully, and the wind blowing a gale. It was often as much as she could do to hold her brush or pencil ; and on several occasions she could not work at all, but only went to return. The "Net" itself had now lost all its shore ; great waves filling it and forcing their way above its columnar masses in mighty jets of water which were sublimely grand to see.

At the end of ten days the weather became very bad, and no more sketching was possible. This being the case, the little company returned to Morr under the careful guardianship of Benwell and his men.

CHAPTER VIII.

ISLAND DAYS.

DURING the elder children's absence, the upper portion of one of several outbuildings at the rear of the Grange had been fitted up as a winter schoolroom, and the lower portion as a carpenter's shop, where, when they had time, the boys were to learn to saw and plane and do other carpenter's work, so as to be ready to fit up their island-house as soon as spring came and its building was finished.

The room ready, schooling was resumed at once, Dr. Marlow riding over from the castle to his scholars three mornings in the week, except—as had been the case at the tower—circumstances prevented, as they still sometimes did for days together. What those circumstances were, had never been explained.

To Mrs. Hexham new duties had been apparently assigned. Her sketches gathered in the studio were rarely touched ; for at least four mornings of every week a carriage fetched her to the castle, and there she remained generally till the children's tea-hour. They were very curious to know why she went, and what she did there ; but they did not even think of questioning her, knowing most surely that she would gravely repel whatever she felt was rude or intrusive, and that did circumstances permit she would certainly tell them the cause of her absence. She was always so loving and confiding, that they felt this truth instinctively.

Still they were, like true children, very curious ; and time only increased this curiosity. They soon became aware that she went to model some person or object. First they missed her modelling tools, then one or more of her working blouses ; then a large cask of modelling clay arrived from Dublin. They observed that on those days—often several in succession—that Dr. Marlow was absent, Mrs. Hexham did not go as usual to the castle. But she lost no time, for she then repaired to the studio and painted so long as daylight lasted.

Early one evening just prior to Christmas, and when Mrs. Hexham had been several days at work in her studio, a note from Miss Haller was brought in. Reading it, and merely saying that she was invited to dine with the Ladies Clare, and that a carriage from the castle would be there to fetch her in half an hour, she at once went upstairs to dress. When she returned, she wore as usual her plain black silk, her beautiful lace frills and simple ornaments ; but she looked so young and lovely, and her rich and abundant brown hair shone so brightly in the strong firelight, that the children thought her quite a picture when she went into the playroom to them, where they were all very busy in various ways. Arthur and Walter were re-lining a little old cabinet the Ladies Clare had sent them as a present ; Harold was stirring some glue over the fire ; Freda was reading ; Iole and Lucy were working a kettle-holder and a cushion cover for the Robinson Crusoe house ; and little Kathie, nursing her large new doll, sat close by and watched Arthur.

"Mamma," said Freda, jumping up, and speaking in her frank impetuous way ; "how nice you look ! I like to see you in this black silk dress, so I hope you will wear it on Christmas-day."

"Yes, I will, dear ; for I am becoming rich enough to buy a new one soon. Indeed, we must all have new clothes, for

our seven months' rambles on hill and shore have brought us to a great state of shabbiness."

"We are certainly not in the fashion, mamma," replied Freda, "judging by the pictures in the illustrated newspapers; but we are all so happy, and we were just saying we like this place better and better every day. And now, please mamma, do remind Miss Haller about the key. She said she would ask the upper servants if they knew of any sets of small keys, so that we may open the beautiful little old box we found in Timber Cove: we all so long to have it unlocked and see what is inside."

"Children's curiosity again!" was the reply. "I will remind Miss Haller; but she has been so engaged. Do you not think, as I am going in the carriage, I might take the box with me? The Ladies Clare might like to see it and hear its strange history."

"Yes, mamma, do take it. What a capital thought!" said several of the children in a breath. "Arthur shall put it in a nice piece of paper and tie some string round it."

Arthur grumbled, but obeyed; he was busy gluing some old velvet on the cabinet shelves, and did not like to be interrupted.

While this was being done, Mrs. Hexham took a bunch of keys from an inner pocket and left the room. She soon returned, bringing with her two water-colour sketches of the recess in which the fall of timber had revealed the chest of drawers. She showed both, and asked the elder children which they liked best. They pointed out the one they preferred.

"Yes, dears, it is the better. It is more finished, and so I will take it. It will give Lady Mary some idea of the wonderful scene. I think I hear the porch-bell; if so, it is the carriage. As soon as I am gone, Freda, carry this other sketch into the studio and put it on the table by the press."

Forbes now announced the carriage, and assisting Mrs. Hexham with her outer wraps, 'she and Milly carried the parcels and lighted the way to the porch, where a footman threw over her a still warmer wrap he took from the carriage, and the lady, stepping within, was soon on her way.

The children resumed their occupations, with the exception of Freda, who, taking up the sketch, went with it into the studio, where a lamp was burning. As she placed it on the table, some small thing on the floor attracted her eye. Stooping and bringing it to the light, she saw it was a small rolled up drawing which had apparently dropped from the press when Mrs. Hexham unlocked it. As the paper was not tied or secured in any way, she unrolled it and looked, and then, making a kind of low cry, stood breathless and terrified. She knew the secret of the castle now, for here it was, in all its pitifulness. Like one become guilty of a crime against her will, she stood some minutes knowing not what to do. Should she call Arthur and show the paper to him? Should she keep the secret in her own breast, and, destroying the paper, let no one ever know she had found it? Or should she, as soon as her dear and good mamma came home, put the paper into her hand, and confess that she had seen it? The first and greatest inclination was to share the secret with Arthur; but then the evil which might be wrought! Then to keep her knowledge of the secret from Mrs. Hexham she felt would be disingenuous and base; it would be acting as a spy while considered a friend. No; she would tell Mrs. Hexham, and pray every night to God for strength to keep the secret so long as needful. She should be such a happy child then, with a conscience free from guile or baseness.

Thus resolving, as her genuine and worthy nature prompted, Freda hastily hid the paper in the bosom of her frock, and fearing, if she were long absent from the playroom, Arthur or

some of the children would be running out to see where she was, hurried upstairs to her bedroom. Here, like the rest, she had a drawer she could keep locked up if she pleased ; so, placing the paper within and locking the drawer, she put the key in her pocket. She then returned downstairs ; and not a minute too soon, for Arthur, wanting her advice as to piecing the velvet, was about to come after her.

"Where have you been, Freda? What have you been doing? I have been waiting these ten minutes."

"You so exaggerate, Arthur : boys always do so. I'm sure I have not been away so long." She hurried to where he stood, and, holding up a candle, answered the questions he put as to the work. But her replies were very distraught ; and more than once she said "yes" for "no," and "no" for "yes."

"How stupid you seem to-night !" said Walter, in turn angrily, though he was very fond of Freda, and they were always great friends. "You told me to cut there, and I ought to have cut here. You see what a mess I have made."

"I am very sorry," began poor Freda.

"It's no use being sorry when mischief is done. Better go back to your story-book," said Arthur. And Freda, very glad to be dismissed, returned to her book. But she could not fix her attention upon it ; the vision she had seen on that small strip of paper, and all it implied, filled her whole thoughts completely. A sort of terror had crept over her—a dread of something she could not define.

She was very glad when Milly came in to take Kathie to bed. Soon after she and the rest were called in to supper ; then Forbes read prayers, and they all went upstairs.

"What I have seen and know now so oppresses me," thought the girl, "that I must tell mamma to-night. If I tell her, my trouble will be over."

She listened impatiently for the sound of the carriage

wheels, and when she heard them she got up and sat on the side of the bed. She knew for certainty that Mrs. Hexham would, so soon as she came upstairs, visit the room ; it being a tender and careful duty she never omitted, however late it might be, to see that the children were all safe and well in their respective beds. Thus, when she entered Freda and Iole's room, and saw the former sitting up, she was at once alarmed, and questioned her.

"I am well, mamma, but I have been waiting anxiously for your return. I have something *very* particular to say to you."

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Hexham quickly, for she noticed Freda's agitation and tremulous voice.

"I cannot tell you here, mamma ; we might be overheard. Will you go into your room and to the fire ? I have something to bring you, and will follow in a moment."

"Well, put this wrap about you, or you will take cold." And Mrs. Hexham, throwing the soft warm shawl which hung upon her arm over Freda's shoulders, went her way. The latter, unlocking the drawer and taking out the little sketch, went with it into Mrs. Hexham's room, closing both doors carefully after her. Then, after a moment's pause, as though dreading what she had to say, she fell upon her knees and buried her face in her mother's lap ; for Mrs. Hexham had taken a seat beside the fire.

"Oh, mamma ! forgive me. I went into the studio, to replace the sketch as you told me to do, and found *this*. It was no fault of mine ; it lay on the floor, and I picked it up. Please forgive me ; I am so very sorry."

The young girl, in her pain and fear, burst into a passionate flood of tears and wept on bitterly.

Mrs. Hexham was terrified too ; her terror and agitation were still more marked than Freda's.

"You have not told Arthur ? You have not shown this to the children ?"

Her voice so trembled that her words were scarcely intelligible.

"No, mamma! no, mamma! My first impulse was to tell Arthur, if not Walter; then I thought I would hide the paper away and never let you know I had seen it. But an instant after I felt this would be base and disingenuous—just like a person who had hearing affecting to be deaf—and that my face would be covered with blushes, and my heart would beat whenever the castle secret was referred to. For it is the castle secret, is it not, mamma?"

"I must not say. It is not a matter on which I can, or ought to talk. It is well for us all you did not show the sketch to the children."

"I did not, mamma. I brought it at once upstairs and locked it in my drawer, for I felt sure that the right thing to do was to tell you. I can keep the secret; I am sure I can."

"You must do so, for conscience' sake, dear Freda—the highest purpose of all. To righteously carry a burden of this sort will strengthen you morally and religiously. Every night, when you pray to our great Creator and thank Him for His daily mercies, ask Him to give you firmness to hold as your life this little secret for a little time. It may be a little or a longer time: He only knows. It is, too, a very pitiful and a very sorrowful secret—such a one as can only be approached with awe and tenderness. You are old enough to understand what I say, and to be faithful to that which an accident has revealed to you."

"I will, mamma! Nothing shall tempt me to betray it; I like to be confided in. To trust me is, I am sure, the way to make me good. If anything leads Arthur to suspect that I know the castle secret, he will tempt me by every means to confide it to him; for he is a curious boy, mamma, and he says he will find it out, come what may."

"That we must leave. Arthur in all things must answer for himself. You must be noble if others are base. Threats I will not use, because I wish you to hold what is thus entrusted to you from a higher, far higher motive, than that of fear. Though thus much I may say: that were it known that any of you children knew this sorrowful truth, it might lead to our immediate return to England, and the loss for ever of our bountiful Irish friends and charming home. Now I can say no more. This subject must never be again referred to between us in any way, by either sign or word. I trust to your fidelity, and expect it of you."

"Indeed, mamma, I will be true as though I were a woman grown."

"I believe you, dear; you have always been very good. Now, good-night. Go to bed, and sleep as the innocent can only sleep, and know I love you very tenderly."

Thus speaking, Mrs. Hexham kissed her, and Freda left the room.

The former had, that night brought back the enamelled box; and while they all sat at breakfast the following morning, she told the children that Lady Mary's maid had found an old key which fitted the lock, but that the Ladies Clare, with great delicacy and refined feeling, had not permitted it to be opened or the contents seen,—considering that the children had a prior right, and ought not to be deprived of a great pleasure. The ladies said Mrs. Hexham's report of the contents would be sufficient for them.

So after breakfast, when the cloth was removed, the children crowded round the table, and the box was opened. On the top, under what had once been layers of paper, lay a small doll of a make far inferior to that of our own day, but exquisitely dressed in the lady's costume current towards the close of the last century, 1785—1795, just prior to a great change in style, in which hoops and

furbelows gave place to narrow skirts and short waists. The dress was of the richest white silk embroidered in gold, and trimming of exquisite lace finished it; the hoops were full-sized, and the doll's hair was gathered in a grand toupée, adorned with beads. Pinned to the stomacher was a little strip of silk, on which was daintily embroidered, "To Penelope, on her third birthday."

The children were all intensely interested; and the elder girls, as the doll passed from hand to hand, felt very sad indeed when Mrs. Hexham explained the probability that "Penelope" was the name of the little child who had gone down in the great deep so long ago, and that this pretty gift was accompanying her to India, whither she was going when lost—with it might be her parents and nurse—in the great Indiaman.

Around this doll of the eighteenth century lay a pretty hat and cloak, and other of its dainty garments, as also a child's coral necklace. Then came fragments of paper, and beneath these lay a most exquisite suite of ladies' ornaments; Wedgwood cameos of the finest period, some set in gold, others in steel; a smelling-bottle hung by a pretty chain, a girdle and clasps, shoe-buckles, two brooches, bracelets, beads and chatelaine. The fine steel setting of those days still kept its polish in a marvellous manner, and the gold was untouched by either damp or time.

Beneath these ornaments, and under other fragments of paper, were more of Wedgwood's exquisite cameos: classical subjects of the finest kind, and of the utmost value. It was evident that they had been bought by a person of wealth and great taste, possibly to be set by Indian goldsmiths, or else to be placed in a cabinet, wherein the owner could often look, not only to admire the grace and perfection of these types of classic art, but the skill of his illustrious countryman, Josiah Wedgwood.

Mrs. Hexham told the children briefly the history of Josiah Wedgwood's life, and the influence of his varied labours in civilizing the habits and promoting the comfort of his countrymen. Then followed a debate as to who should be made possessor of these beautiful things—more especially the unmounted cameos. Mrs. Hexham suggested that the box should be again taken to the castle, and the Ladies Clare be solicited to accept some of the gems for their own use. To this the children agreed; only saying that what was returned ought to be taken by Mrs. Hexham, as she understood and valued these things as few did. To these suggestions she assented, only resolving, if many of these things became hers, to spare a few for their cabinet, knowing well the influence of beauty on children's taste.

As had been previously arranged, Lally Shiel the carpenter, or else one of his sons, came over twice a week from Islandmore, to give the three boys lessons in carpentry. They were all apt to learn, especially Arthur and Walter. Thus they were soon adepts in sawing, planing, dovetailing, gluing, and other branches of such work; and so soon as this was the case, they commenced making door and window frames, shelves, cupboards, and other necessary things. For though old Mike the fisherman had told them that fitted woodwork would be found in abundance among the mighty heaps of "Timber Cove," Lally Shiel, who knew necessarily more about housebuilding than an old man who had spent the greater part of his life in a boat and with his nets and lobster pots, advised that such things as door and window frames, which ought to be sound and fit well, both for the sake of appearance and keeping out wet and cold, should be made with care and of good sound wood; as he well said, "the greater part of that in 'Timber Cove' was worm-eaten or affected with dry rot, more especially those portions which had been forced farthest inland, and were necessarily the

oldest. Those portions which lay nearest the sea were the newest, and so of course the soundest; but they were inaccessible through all the winter months, for they were covered fathoms deep in foam and water. The floors of the island-house could, he added, "be left till the spring, as it was just possible some excellent planks could be found, that with a little management and cutting would serve very well."

The boys liked their work and carpenter's shop immensely, and they brought thither some boxes which had previously stood in the playroom. These were supposed to contain an odd miscellany of cricket bats and balls, wickets, fishing-tackle, skates, and fifty other things. One box Arthur and Walter took care to keep carefully locked, for it held the telescope they had taken from the cave, and which had been more or less, since they became possessed of it, a source of great anxiety to them. For the first few weeks they had kept it hidden amid the furze bushes near the cave. Then they removed it to the tower; and, as winter approached, and they heard that the tower was going to be locked up and the keys taken to the castle, they smuggled it home one evening, and concealed it under various sheets of brown paper in their largest box; for they rightly feared that if Freda and the other children found it, their possession of it would soon be reported to Mrs. Hexham. If so, its history would be strictly inquired into, and with the result that it would be taken away.

One evening, when old Shiel and his son had given their lesson, and had repaired to the kitchen to take some supper with Denis before returning to Islandmore, Arthur asked Walter where Harold was.

"In the house. He went half an hour ago to play backgammon with Freda."

"Then I can just say, Walter, without being overheard, that I shall be very glad when we can take our things to the

island, for the girls are always asking me what I have got in this box."

"Oh, it is just like girls; they are all so curious—Freda especially."

"Yes," replied Arthur; "I shall be glad when we have got it safe over there. For if Mrs. Hexham or old Grimwig got to know of it, it would be taken away, and we should be made to tell how we got it. And if we did, it would be—and truly—said that we had stolen it. It was really stealing, for we asked nobody's leave."

"We meant to do," said Walter; "or at least return it soon. You recollect we said we would tell the old mourvreen we had borrowed it; but after that scene with the coastguardsmen, why——"

"She is coming here soon, to see Kathie," interrupted Arthur earnestly, "and then we will get Pat to tell her for us. To borrow and to steal are two very different things, and my conscience has been tender about the matter some time. However bad Quinlivan might be, it was mean of us to sneak into the cave and take his goods under pretence of borrowing. Those savages we saw at "Timber Cove" could not do worse."

"Well, we'll speak to Norah and get over *that*. But the purpose for which we want the telescope—is that good?" and Walter smiled as he questioned.

"Oh, as to that," replied Arthur, "there can be no harm in looking through it, and finding out, if we can, what we want to know. I hate secrets, and this I am determined to discover."

No more was said that night, for they were called in to supper; but they looked forward, nevertheless, with some anxiety, for Norah's visit.

Christmas was near; and with that season she kept her promise and came to see Kathie, bringing with her various

dainties, and, as a present, Billy, old Shavy's husband. He had a grand beard and fine horns ; but he had fallen into disgrace, and so was dismissed to distant quarters. He had butted at his old mistress and thrown her down, and so increased her lameness. It was therefore thought better to send him to his wife, Shavy, and his son and daughter, Snap and Jessy.

A few weeks' rest and comfort with her sister had been greatly beneficial to old Norah ; and she came, moreover, better clad than any one had previously seen her. She looked now like a decent old country woman or small farmer's wife, and not, as hitherto, a harassed and wandering beggar.

So all were very kind to her, and she sat in one of the wide corners of the kitchen chimney, smoked her pipe, knitted the children stockings, and talked in Irish to Denis and others who came to and fro. She was ever ready to do a hand's turn at dairy or kitchen, or show her gratitude in other ways.

It proved to be a charming Christmastide. Dainties of every kind were sent from the castle, as also a variety of lovely and useful presents. The children were intensely happy, and those of them who could write sent letters to the Ladies Clare to thank them for all their generous goodness.

Revealing to Pat as much as they thought desirable, Arthur and Walter stole into the kitchen one evening when the boy and the old mourvreen sat by the fire, and opened the subject of the telescope through their interpreter, saying they had borrowed it for a little time. Great was their delight when Norah said that they might keep it altogether. If they had not had it, the coastguard would, as they had taken everything else. Indeed she was very glad they had it, as it had been Quinlivan's favourite glass, and had cost a large sum. It therefore only remained to beg her to keep their secret—

professing, what was in some measure the truth, that Mrs. Hexham and Dr. Marlow might not like them to be spying about the place. So Norah innocently acquiesced, and there for the present the matter ended. In a few days the old woman departed to her home amid the hills, well laden with many nice and comfortable gifts for herself and her sister, and promising to come again early in the spring to see the child.

With February came some mild and dry weather ; and Dr. Marlow omitting his lessons for a few days, and Mrs. Hexham her visits to the castle, though meanwhile painting diligently in her studio, the boys paid several long visits to the island, and laid out their garden and what were to be two little fields when the time came for sowing wheat and barley—for, like Robinson Crusoe, they determined to grow their own corn, grind it in some way yet to be settled, and make Freda and the other girls learn to make bread. They meant to have a dairy, and make butter and cheese from goats' milk, and store up eggs for nice puddings and other purposes. Accordingly, Billy and Shavy and their two little ones were transported to the island, as also all the cocks and hens ; Mike promising to look after "the purty crathurs" when it so happened that "the little gintlemin were busy with their larning."

The garden they dug up and planted wholly themselves ; they put in gooseberry and currant bushes and raspberry canes, and planted potatoes, and sowed mustard and cress, and parsley, and radishes, and peas, and onions, and many other culinary things.

The garden thus settled, bad weather followed, and continued for the rest of February and all March, and the lessons were resumed, and the children very busy. Even little Kathie became a scholar, for Freda taught her the alphabet, as also her notes on the piano ; and as she was the brightest of little Irish fairies, she learnt quickly.

With April came Easter, very fine weather, and a nice long holiday ; and the work at the island was resumed in earnest. Some days the ponies were all busy in journeys to and fro to the shore, fetching what further stones were necessary for the house. New mortar was made, and building renewed. Then the boys, and Mike and Denis, and Lally Shiel and two of his sons, made a special visit to "Timber Cove," starting early one fine spring morning, and returning late in the evening, and there selected what planks and wood they needed. They could now search the great pile in its portions nearest the sea, and where the timber was the fruit of the latest wrecks. Here they found long planks in abundance, many of them being of the choicest kinds of foreign wood. But the old carpenter had been quite right : the window and door frames and doors of ships, however large, would not have suited their island house, so they were very glad they had listened to good advice, and got their fittings ready, as by doing this so much time would be saved. In their search they also found many things which were likely to prove useful—such as cabin chairs, lockers, and shelving.

At work early and late on such days as were free from lessons, a period of six weeks brought their house-building to a close. A bricklayer from Islandmore came to help them with the roof, which was formed partly of dark-red clay tiles brought from a tilery far away, and partly of flat slate-like shingles from the shore ; these last being of varied colours. Drainage pipes had been laid down at the time the foundations were dug, and now the internal fittings were begun. A wide external covered-in staircase was built in the angle formed by the galleries and the western tower, and a lower staircase to kitchen, larder, and dairy, led down from the same point. These staircases were of wood brought from "Timber Cove," as was also the floor of the upper gallery or long central room, the side rooms, and upper floors of the two towers.

With respect to the lower floors, Mrs. Hexham had from the first thought that they should be of tile-work, as also the wall-linings ; but till it was ascertained that tiles would be procurable within a reasonable distance, this matter had to stand over.

At length the lower flooring was waited for, and old Norah paying her promised visit to the Grange just at this juncture, bringing with her, as a present for the island-house, a charming brood of little white ducks with pretty yellow feathers on their necks, Mrs. Hexham questioned her as to the mountain potter, and was glad to learn that he and his boys were at home and at work ; but now that summer was near at hand, they would soon be away hawking their goods about the country. There was therefore no time to lose in searching him out, and more particularly as Mrs. Hexham was at a standstill for modelling-clay, her last supply from Dublin being exhausted. Could what further quantity she needed be obtained nearer home, it would be a convenience to her in several ways.

Accordingly it was settled that, upon old Norah's return to the hills, she should serve as a guide to the potwork. She was to ride behind Pat on a pillion, while Mrs. Hexham and the four eldest children would use their ponies. Upon hearing of this intended journey, Miss Haller suggested the use of the fourgon and a pair of swift horses, and Dr. Marlow thought the recent present of a basket-carriage would do ; but it was soon recollected that many of the hills were very steep and stony, and the hollows between them, though used as roads, were often too narrow for more than the passage of an ass and its panniers ; indeed, in some cases, the panniers had to be carried through singly on the top of the ass's back.

One morning, therefore, late in May, the little company left the Grange as early as six o'clock, and by carefully selecting the nearest possible way, they reached the moor-

land amid the lonely hills before noon. Here, taking a pretty fair road which led into the depths of an extensive bog, they came in sight of a cluster of mud cabins and sheds, piles of clay and piles of turf, and the inevitable potter's oven. In various places about the sheds were a number of what were known in old days in Staffordshire as "sun-pans,"—namely, square and shallow hollows fenced in with brick. In these the clay, when mixed with water and then occasionally stirred up, was left to the slow process of evaporation; the rays of the sun and the blowing of the wind drying up the water, and leaving the clay fit for after-processes.

Their approach was heralded by the bark of a couple of half-starved curs, and this brought to the door of the largest cabin a woman and a troop of squalid-looking children; a sow and her little ones following slowly in their wake. But seeing a man and a couple of boys at work in an open shed, Mrs. Hexham rode up to it and stayed. The potter left his wheel, the boy in the distance ceased turning it; and as the hands of the former were clayey, and he could not, with the irresistible politeness of an Irishman, touch his forelock, he said cheerfully,—

"Good day, me lady: what would yer be nading with the likes of me?"

"Several things, Mr. Tarra,—for you see I know your name. I was one of a little company who, riding through the hills last autumn, asked you if there were good clays near Morr, and you said 'yes.' Now, I want some white clay without going far for it. Then I want to know if you make tiles—not house-tiles, but tiles for floors and even walls. My nephew here and two other young gentlemen are building a play-house on an island in the beautiful lake which lies in front of Castle Morr."

"There's plenty of clays there, me lady: white, and a fine

red that hasn't its better like in Ireland. Whin I go that way—and that's not often, sorra to say, for the roads be long and the people few—I've brought me lad a few bits in the inds of the baskets to stick on his pots, for grate is his 'cuteness in making purty things. Yes, me lady ; there's lovely clays at Morr."

"I want some white, or whitish-grey, for modelling with."

The mountain potter passed his hand over his face interrogatively, as though he did not quite understand.

"For making a figure—an image—with. An image that is to be copied in marble. The saints in your chapels are often wrought in marble."

"Shure ; the Blissid Mother is in marble at Loughrea. The Holy Pope sint it."

"Well, it was probably copied from a model first made in clay. So, as I want some, cannot you and your boys come to Morr and dig it out of the hillsides? Those for whom I work can pay you very handsomely."

"No doubt, misthress. But all winter I've been making me pots, and nade to sell 'im. I begin to travel next wake—me and me lads, all but the biggest."

"That's your clever lad?"

"Yes, me lady ; he's working in the shed there. He's not over sthrong, and the wet and the cold and the hills don't shute him."

"Well, couldn't you come with him to Morr for a week or two and show him the hillsides where the clay is?—and when you had shown him, we could get a strong man or two to dig. Then we could talk to him about the tiles—the tiles we want for the floor of a rustic house, perhaps for the walls."

"Me Phin would be the lad, misthress. He makes purty things ; and if the people would buy 'im it would be good for the likes of me. But they won't. Pots and pans, wid a

bit of a glaze on 'im, is all they likes. If you'll be stepping down (me boy here can hold the pony) and follow me, you shall see what Phin Tarra can do. He wants the schuling ; and that can't be had in the bogs of Ireland."

As he spoke, the potter stepped out into the sunshine and led the way through a wreck of broken potsherds, waste clay, stones, and turf, to a distant shed ; and Mrs. Hexham and the children, alighting, followed him. The shed was larger, and not open, like the rest. There was a half-hatch door to it, a fireplace, and two windows ; also a thrower's wheel, some moulding boards, a few shelves, a stool and a chair. The lad, who was thin and sickly-looking, stood before one of the boards at work, and, scared perhaps by the entrance of so many strangers, sought to hide its nature by drawing a piece of sacking over it. Then he turned round and stood bashfully like a girl.

"This is the way wid him, me lady : hiding all he does like a bad penny. Show the things you've been doing, me boy. This is a grate lady, come from Castle Morr. She wants us to find the clay there ; and she needs tiles—purty tiles—for a house these little gintlemin be building there."

This speech increased the lad's bashfulness ; so the father, seeing he did not move, went up to the board and withdrew the sacking. Beneath it was a longitudinal tile or plaque formed of red clay ; in this he had cut, or scooped out, or, as it is artistically called, incised certain outlines, which he was now filling up with clays of other colours. Though unconscious of such a term, it was a fine geometrical pattern very artistically rendered. Mrs. Hexham admired, though criticising as she passed over its details.

"This is jist what ye nade, me boy," the father said,—
"somebody to give ye the good advice. We can make the bits of pots and pans, but nothing better. There's little or no larning in that."

By her gentle words and manner, and her evident knowledge of the subject, Mrs. Hexham presently lessened the lad's great bashfulness, and he showed her various pieces of finished and unfinished work, in the form of tiles, plaques, dishes, flower-pots, and other fancy things—some having passed the fire, others not. But before she had seen the half of them, she felt sure that he was the possessor of great natural capacity and taste, only needing cultivation to make them of value to himself and others. She therefore bent her mind to the one purpose of inducing the elder Tarra to come to Morr during the following week, and bring Phineas with him,—the ostensible reason being the search for and preparation of some clay for her use, and a sight of the place for which decorative tiles were required; but in graver reality to set the lad to work amid the children, and give him some artistic culture as he went along. She bought several tiles and other pieces, and allowed Arthur and the rest to do the same; and she propitiated the father by overlooking his stock of bowls, jugs, and dishes, and buying a considerable quantity of the same for the use of the dairy and kitchen at the Grange. For these she paid, and arranged with him to bring them on his asses the following week, which he gratefully promised to do. Phineas also promised to come; he liked the lady's face and manner, both of which were so different to any he had hitherto known.

While thus Mrs. Hexham settled with the elder Tarra, the children, as curious children do, visited the several sheds and then the cabins. Of these last there were three: the largest being that occupied by the potter's family; the others by near relations. In one of the latter they came upon a tame magpie in a wicker cage. It was very crafty, the people said, and often hid things away in a most mysterious manner; and as they offered to sell, Arthur and Walter

bought it, cage and all, for half a crown. Its name was "Trick," and very tricky indeed it proved to be. The potter was to bring both cage and bird the following week on the top of his lightest-laden panniers.

Leaving the pot-work in the full bright light of the lovely afternoon, the little company took their homeward way to Morr; old Norah accompanying them so far as a guide was needed. She then alighted, and with many blessings on those who were so good to her, turned her face once more to the hills.

The potter and his boy were faithful to their word, and came to the Grange the following week. Denis found them good lodging in one of the outhouses, and took them food from the kitchen; and early next morning the elder Tarra set off to the beautiful high ground which rose above the lake. Here he soon found the kind of clay Mrs. Hexham needed; and, aided by Mike and another man, and with tools they brought, he lost no time in extracting it from the grassy steeps, and carrying it to a shallow of the lake near at hand. Here he made some troughs in the gravel, lined them with boards, and in these washed and wrought it in a very workmanlike manner.

Phineas remained behind, at Mrs. Hexham's request; and after breakfast, as she was not going to the castle till the evening, she sent for him, and, taking him into her studio, showed him her paintings and models in clay, and various valuable illustrated books, a few of which she had brought from England. But the larger and more valuable part belonged to the castle; the Ladies Clare and Dr. Marlow having sent them down from time to time. These last included Gruner's beautiful work on the Italian terra cottas of the Middle Ages, Shaw's "Decorative Tile Work," and many others. Phineas, who was utterly untutored, and had never seen a painting or an illustrated book of any value,

or a model or a piece of pottery of good form, was quite speechless with astonishment. He trembled very much, and looked at many things again and again. What most attracted his attention was a few of the finely-coloured plates in Gruner's great work on terra cottas, and a small red and black vase of Grecian workmanship.

Early in the afternoon Mrs. Hexham rode with the children to the lake, Pat and Phineas going before on the old horse Denis used. When they reached the island house, she showed the lad the central and side rooms, the towers and oriels. The lower floors and all the inner walls might, she said, be covered with beautifully decorated tile-work, the colours being for the larger part high and pronounced—as a contrast to the varied greens of grass, shrubs, and trees, and to the blueness of the lake's rippling water. There should be, she added, much dark-red and black, and some yellow, white, and blue. She would make him drawings if he would try to copy them, and procure him some details as to processes from a Staffordshire manufacturer of tiles. She also said that Arthur, Walter and Harold should help him in his work whenever possible, as they had a great desire to have a hand in every process connected with their house. Phineas merely replied "yes" and "no." He was, as his father said, "a silent boy, but a wonder in 'cuteness,'" so it was just possible this silence might prove fruitful.

From the island the little company walked to the shallows where Tarra and Mike and the other men were at work. The former was full of wonder at the variety and beauty of the clays he had found, and said that some little way beyond, and where the wood curved away and hid the castle, there was just the place for a little pot-work. Upon Tarra saying this, Mrs. Hexham asked him to stay the summer and help Phineas in his tile-making. He replied, "he would think over the kind offer, and consult his 'Nanny' when he wint

home the following wake. He thought it would be a purty thing for him ; for his boys, Will and Ben, could go th' journeys wid the asses and the pots ; but his Nanny and the rist of the childer would be nading to come wid him, for shure what would life be widout the tinder crathurs !”

In the course of a few days Mrs. Hexham was well supplied with fine modelling-clay—indeed, finer than any she had previously had—and her daily work at the castle was renewed. The use of the schoolroom in the tower had also been resumed as soon as settled weather had set in ; and thus the business of each week shaped itself out pretty much after the manner of the weeks of the previous summer. There were hard lessons and much study on certain days, and as hard work at the island on others.

By the beginning of June, matters stood thus :—The upper floor of the house was finished all but decorating, as the plaster on the walls had to dry and the style of decoration to be determined on. The kitchen, dairy, scullery and larder were ready for use ; the goats, fowls, ducks, and magpie had been transported to the island, and were quite at home there. The prettiest flowers throve wonderfully in the borders about the house ; the different vegetables in the garden promised well, and the various little fruit trees as yet planted gave signs of fruit. Phineas worked all day at clay finding and clay washing ; and whenever Mrs. Hexham could spare the time, she gave him lessons in drawing ; and the children severally undertook to improve him in reading, writing, and ciphering. Phineas was a good lad, and soon formed a part in the busy household. His father as yet had not returned from his pot-work in the hills.

As soon as they had made a closet in which they could lock it up, Arthur and Walter had taken over the telescope from the Grange ; but though they had watched very eagerly for an opportunity of using it, none had yet occurred. They

were always too busy to leave what they were then about ; or some one was present,—perhaps workmen from Islandmore, or else Pat, Denis, or Mike.

At length, however, one pleasant sunny afternoon, Arthur and Walter were alone on the island, and busy in the eastern tower of their house. There were three pretty casemented windows in it, and the windows were in and glazed—one of Lally Shiel's sons, who was a glazier by trade, having done this part of the work. They were fixing in some broad window-seats, when Arthur, stepping back for a moment to view what he had done, said softly,—

“Walter ! here's a capital view of the balcony window which was made last summer, and the reflecting mirrors which were placed beside it. Shall we get the telescope and look ? We may perhaps make something out.”

“We had better first be sure that no one is about,” replied Walter, stopping in his work.

They both ran downstairs to see ; but not a creature was on the island or on the opposite shore. They searched everywhere very carefully, and, on their return, they brought the telescope with them. They fixed it so that it would not be seen, screened themselves behind it, and then looked one after the other ; but the little they could see only intensified their curiosity without revealing the mystery they so longed to know. They saw the foot of what appeared to be a short wide couch ; this was low, curved, and stuffed ; and on this, tucked up like a pincushion, was the favourite black tom-cat Mrs. Hexham had brought from England. It had disappeared soon after it came to the Grange, and the children had all along suspected that it had been taken to the castle, or else, roving there, had been detained. Luffy, too, accompanying her mistress so constantly, had been much away ; and for the past week or two had not returned. The children knew that the Ladies Clare had various

household pets, among which were several Isle of Skye dogs of great beauty. Some of these they had seen ; others not. Among the last was a lovely little fellow, named Doric. To him Lufy had taken a great affection, and this was why she often stayed ; for she had become Doric's wife, and expected a little family. Since she had been away altogether, the children, especially the younger, had often asked Mrs. Hexham about her ; but the only reply they received was that she should come home by-and-by.

Now, to the boys' astonishment, they could see Lufy curled up in a pretty basket, amid some folds of red flannel ; and they knew by this her family was there.

"Well," said Arthur, with something like indignation, "everything goes to the castle for Mr. Mystery or whoever he may be. I really think Lufy's place was the Grange on such an occasion. I suppose Mr. Mystery or Dr. Grimwig will keep all the pups, and send her back when they are full grown. It is really too bad of Edith, for she might at least have told us."

"Perhaps she may tell us this evening, for the family may have only just come. Yes ! I think so,"—and Walter, looking still more closely through the telescope, which he had only taken the minute before, added, "That's just it ; Miss Haller is kneeling down and giving her something in a saucer, and another dog with the most lovely ears has just come to the side of the basket ; and, though only looking in with great interest, Lufra is grumbling at him, no doubt, for she has raised her head, and her ears are shaking. See for yourself, Arthur."

Arthur applied his eye to the telescope for some minutes in silence ; and then he said with much gravity, and in the lowest undertone,—“ I see what is more of account. In this room Mrs. Hexham is doing her modelling work, I am sure, and at a point not far off the couch. She has just come to

its foot, and now stands there apparently talking, while holding in one hand a small piece of clay, and in the other one of her modelling tools. This is something to know. Now, look yourself."

Walter looked, and saw the same thing ; but he was not so eager for the solution of the mystery as Arthur, so his eye took a wider range.

"Arthur," he said presently, "those mirrors or reflectors on either side the balcony windows give a reflexion of this room, as also of several others. Almost all which takes place in kitchen and dairy must be seen, and a portion of the long rooms are reflected. You must take care, or our use of this telescope will be soon no secret."

"I do not care if it is," was Arthur's very wrong reply : "I hate secrets ; just tell us the truth, and there's an end to it. But I am never baffled either in work or play ; and *this* thing, whatever it may be, I *will* find out."

"I think we had both better let it alone ; we may know it presently, and that will be time enough. It is not honourable of us to be spying and prying in this way, or grateful to those who are so very kind to us. And what the better shall we be if we *do* make it out ? Be sure the secret is only a dismal one : something about a sick man, or a very ugly man, or a dwarf. I fancy it is this last."

"I know it is," replied Arthur ; "I overheard the young Shiels calling some one 'the little man,' and another time 'the manikin.' Then they laughed ; but, observing me listening, they said no more."

"Well, let us leave the 'little man' alone. He is a very good one, be sure."

"He may be ; but I'll find the secret out," was Arthur's determined reply : "not so much because I want to know it, as that it is kept from me."

"Well, take your own way," was Walter's reply ; "I am

sure if you do find it out in any unworthy manner, you will be sorry afterwards. Now let us get on with our work, or we shall not finish this job by the time we must leave off to go."

Arthur was rather angry ; but he locked up the telescope and resumed his tools, pondering meanwhile all sorts of fresh schemes to fathom what to him had become almost a grievance. He could think of no feasible one ; for, the aid of the telescope failing, as it seemed to do, there was only left a fresh attempt to enter the castle unobserved, and this seemed more than ever an impossibility against the already excited vigilance of a trained and powerful dog like Nero.

Trick, the magpie, as already said, had been brought to the isle in his cage ; and this had been hung up on a nail outside the kitchen door. As the boys had previously learnt, the bird had the habit of letting himself out and into his cage whenever he thought proper. His moods were fitful. Sometimes he would go away for the whole day, at others he would remain at home ; sometimes he chose the morning for his travels, sometimes the evening. When he wanted to go forth, he pulled out the peg from the door of his cage with slow and most comical solemnity ; and when he returned, he reversed the same process with the dignity of a beadle closing a pew-door on an alderman.

That afternoon, on coming to work, both boys noticed that the cage was empty ; and now, on going to look for him prior to returning home, they saw him on his perch with something white under his right claw, and all the floor of the cage strewn with minute pieces of letter-paper.

"Whatever has that fellow been doing !" said Walter with some astonishment. "He has been thieving, I suppose. What is it ?"

"Yes ! what is it ?" questioned Arthur, equally curious.

"You must mind how you touch him," said Walter. "Phineas says he digs his beak into your hand like a penknife, or else scratches you with his talons. He drew blood from Pat the other day, and bites, as he said, 'like a devil.'"

"We'll give him a sweet biscuit," replied Arthur; "Freda and the girls brought some, with lots of other messes for housekeeping, last week." And Arthur, hurrying to a closet he and Walter had fitted up, soon brought back a pretty-looking biscuit all shining with white sugar. The moment Trick saw it he lifted his claw, and what was beneath fell down. Arthur drew this at once from the cage, and then they perceived that it was a small and exceedingly fine cambric pocket-handkerchief; in one corner was marked a coronet, and under it were the two letters "R. D."

"This must come from the castle," said Walter. "It is clean, and has been recently scented. To whom can it belong? Not to the Ladies Clare,—for their names, as we know, are Mary and Isabel."

"To Mr. Mystery, of course," replied Arthur. "To my Lord *Minimus*,—a good name for him. Trick, you are a capital fellow; I shall dote on you; you shall visit my Lord whenever you like. Walter, let us give him another biscuit, and then we can clear out the bits of paper."

Trick was equally anxious to take a second cake, and, while eating it, the boys picked up the paper. These fragments had, when together, evidently formed a well-written note; but the bird had so torn and jagged them that it was impossible to piece more than three or four together. Even then little could be learnt. The note had commenced "My dear Donore," and related to some show of pictures in London. The handwriting was refined, and that of a man, and the words "dear brother" were twice repeated.

"Not much to learn," said Arthur in a tone of disappointment; "but Trick, who seems a desperate thief, will probably pay further visits unless he is caught and his neck is wrung; so our knowledge may increase. I do not think we must say anything to Mrs. Hexham about Trick's thievery, or we shall have to take him back to the Grange. One thing I will do: I will tell Freda, and hear what she says. I have a great idea that she knows something about my Lord Minimus, for now, whenever I refer to the castle secret, she turns so red, and for a minute or two is too confused to speak."

"All this is mere imagination," replied Walter; "you so allow this supposed secret to govern and influence your thoughts, Arthur, that you are ready to believe anything. I don't think Freda knows."

"I am sure she knows," was the quick reply; "and you shall judge for yourself to-night. If she knows, I will know, and that's certain."

Walter made no reply; and they prepared to go. Pat had by this time arrived, and the ponies were outside; so, mounting, they had soon crossed the temporary bridge, and were on their way home.

That evening, when Arthur and Walter were alone with Freda just previous to supper-time, the former said quietly,—

"Freda, look at me: I have something to say."

Freda, who was just finishing the writing of her German exercise for the morrow, looked up.

"Do you know anything about the 'little man' at the castle—Mr. Manikin, or, as I call him, 'My Lord Minimus'? See, we have had a good fairy working for us! Here's his pocket-handkerchief, and here's a piece of one of his letters." And as he said this, Arthur looked at her very fixedly.

Freda had a quick and tender conscience, but also great

firmness. She coloured and trembled perceptibly, but answered, as calmly as she could,—

“How and why should I know? Why are you always harping on this matter? As mamma justly says, whether or not there is a secret, the subject is best let alone. The Ladies Clare are such noble friends to us children that we ought not to question their simple wish for silence as to their home and domestic surroundings.”

“I know that as well as you do; but I hate mystery. Mamma of course knows the secret; and I am positively certain you do. As to this pocket-handkerchief, why——”

“How did you get it?” And Freda in her turn burnt with curiosity.

“That’s just it! You want to know my secret, and won’t tell me yours; so we’re even. All I will say is this,—I have a good fairy at work.”

Freda, whose apprehension was very acute, pondered a moment, and then said quickly, “Oh, I guess who your fairy is! It is Trick. Arthur, how wicked you are to send that thievish bird through the castle windows, as you must have done! How could it get these things without going there? It is really cruel. And you do not know what mischief may follow. Mamma ought to know this.”

“I did not send the bird,” replied the boy angrily: “ask Walter if I did. I cannot help the bird’s propensities. As to telling Edith, you can if you please. It will just suit your love of tale-bearing. I only know that if you get me into any trouble, I will leave Morr on foot and get back to England as well as I can. I can go as a ship lad, if fit for nothing else.” So speaking, with fierce determination and in great anger, Arthur left the room.

Freda was very much hurt, and cried bitterly. This was the first serious jar she and Arthur had ever had, for she loved him so dearly, and always so earnestly sought to

please him. Still she resolved to be true to the secret she had accidentally discovered. That was her first duty, though she was very sorry that Arthur should call her "a tale-bearer." It was so untrue; yet she very wisely determined not to carry the quarrel onward, or to say anything about the silly treacherous bird to Mrs. Hexham—knowing that Arthur was a boy of very determined will, and that with him to say was to do. So thus the matter rested for the present.

In about a fortnight from the time of his departure, the elder Tarra returned to Morr. He had been waiting, he said, "to see how me two boys had throve with the asses and pots; and, wonderful to say—young thoughtless things as they are—they've thraded and done better than meself, Tim Tarra. They've brought back the asses well and capering, the purty things! and not a pot wid 'im; and all the money in a bag, jist as though it was the gratest bank in ould Ireland. And this in tin days, the diligint crathurs! So, thanks to ye, me lady, the boys can do for thimsilves through the summer, and me and me Nanny and th' rist o' th' childer will sittle where ye plase, and not grumble at all, at all, at what work we do."

All this, and much more, was said to Mrs. Hexham on the morrow after Tarra's return, and when he had had a few hours' time to ascertain how kind she and the children had been to Phineas. Already the poor uncouth lad showed signs of improvement, and his joy at being taught drawing was extreme.

As usual, Dr. Marlow was consulted, and he bore the various messages in relation to Phineas and his father to the castle. The answer was propitious. The elder Tarra might establish a small pot-work on the site named, in the curve of the great woodland. He might dig for clay, soapstone, manganese, and coal; also take turf from the bog, and sere

timber from the shore or the woods. But his wife and children must not live too near the castle. Away from the intended pot-work; about a mile and a half in the woods, but at a beautiful point where there were open glades, water, and turf, was a roomy keeper's cottage. It had been shut up some time, and needed repairs; but these could be soon effected; and here Tarra and his family could live free of cost.

This offer he gratefully accepted; and during some subsequent days, while this home was preparing, he and Phineas, with some little help, built on the site determined on a long working shed with a partition in it, a slip-kiln, an oven, and a hovel round it. These finished, he dug for various sorts of clay; mixed, and otherwise prepared them. He then returned to the hills for "Nanny an' th' childer," his working tools and apparatus, and necessary household goods,—these last including his cow and three "purty pigs," and a small cavalcade of asses and ponies.

As soon as the oven was ready, and while Phineas was busy with some pretty red and black glazed tiles for the kitchen, dairy, pantry, and scullery floors, as also for the pavement, leading down by a step to the lake, his father made a nice assemblage of red glazed dairy vessels—such as basins, shallow pans, crocks, and mugs—for as yet the goats' milk had been given away. But now the dairy was entirely finished. Dina, a clever tidy servant Forbes had lately hired as cook, went over occasionally to the isle on holiday afternoons, and taught Freda and the two other girls how to manage the dairy and make butter and cheese. Pat did the milking, and fed and tended the goats and poultry; and on such days as Freda and the rest could not, on account of their lessons, go to the isle, he carried on the work of the dairy as cleverly as could be.

The firm of Staffordshire potters to whom Mrs. Hexham

had applied sent ample instructions as to better methods for Phineas to use in the matter of fabricating ornamental tiles. These she read to him slowly and carefully several times over ; and his apprehension being extraordinarily quick in all which related to his work, he soon comprehended them. Then she went over again with him the finely illustrated books already mentioned ; and taking some hints therefrom, though guided by her own taste, and still more by his, she drew to scale five different patterns for the lower floor : namely, the most elaborate, yet subdued in colouring, for the entrance gallery or hall ; two more, full of colouring, yet of different patterns, for the side rooms ; and for the floors of the pretty towers, choice diapered sections of much brightness. On these Phineas set to work at once, making each tile first in a mould, then, while soft, cutting out the lines, or rather grooves necessary for pattern, and then filling up these interspaces or incised lines with the necessary coloured clays. This done, they were fired—that is to say, burnt to a certain degree of hardness in the oven—then more or less dipped in glaze, as the case might be, and fired again. While these were in progress, the elder Tarra, under his son's guidance, made a number of plain tiles of various coloured clays ; which, when fired and glazed, were of different shades of primrose, cream-colour, grey, brown, and black. He also made some of a dull brownish-red colour. For these Mrs. Hexham prepared sketches, which Phineas, Arthur, Walter, and Freda copied just as time permitted. The tiles thus painted were fired, then glazed, and fired again. Another sort were fresco-painted—that is, while the clay was somewhat soft—and then put into the oven.

While these labours were proceeding, and the beautiful early and middle summer was passing by, several circumstances came about which added interest to the daily life at Morr. During the previous winter, young Philip Shiel, one

of old Lally's sons, had, in coming to and fro to Morr to teach the boys carpentering, fallen in love with Milly the housemaid, and she returned his suit. They were therefore engaged to be married; and now, summer coming on, and Phil's work lying for the time on a distant estate of the Ladies Clare, he thought he might as well get married and take his pretty bride with him as go alone; so he spoke to Milly, and then to his parents, and the matter was speedily arranged. Milly was to be married at Islandmore in a month from that date; and therefore Forbes had notice that her good servant would leave. All the household were very sorry, for Milly was a good and clever girl. Early in the year Forbes had found it necessary to hire another servant to cook and attend to both dairy and kitchen, for the labour of assisting Milly and Joyce, superintending the children during Mrs. Hexham's almost daily absence at the castle, the necessary needlework and management of the house, had been too much for her; so a cook and dairymaid combined had been inquired for in a distant town, and after some little difficulty met with. Dina was quite twenty-six years of age, and having lived in respectable families, was experienced, and thus a valuable and accomplished servant. She, on her part, was very glad indeed to take a place at Morr, for Mrs. Hexham's fame as a good and gentle lady had spread itself abroad even in that wild and solitary country; and, moreover, Dina had relatives in Islandmore, near whom she wished to live.

Forbes was about to journey to the distant town from whence Dina had come, in order to procure a successor to Milly, when one morning, among Mrs. Hexham's English letters, was one addressed to her in an unknown hand. When opened, it bore the signature of a stranger, and was dated from a south-western suburb of London. The writer said that she had a servant living with her named Mary O'Roone, who, wishing to have some news of "the dear

lady Mrs. Hexham," had asked her to write. Some fourteen months previously Mary had lived with a Mrs. Gunn, who kept a middle-class lodging-house. There it was she had helped to nurse the lady through a most dangerous illness. But a week after Mrs. Hexham left for Ireland, Mary, through the carelessness of a lodger, who had thrown two pairs of boots on to the staircase, fell down a long flight, and fractured her thigh in a very bad manner. She was carried to the nearest hospital, and there remained for four months—it being at first supposed that her limb would have to be amputated close to the body. But through the wonderful skill and untiring care of the hospital surgeons and nurses, a perfect cure was effected; and one of the former, who took great interest in her, procured her the excellent place she now held. "She has lived with me nine months," continued the lady in her letter, "and a better or worthier servant mistress never had. But last week, taking a holiday, she paid a visit to the distant neighbourhood in which you had resided; and, calling at a greengrocer's shop, she there found a letter from you, which had lain unclaimed for just a twelvemonth. Since then her whole thoughts and talk have been of you and the children. For several reasons she wishes to return to Ireland, and thus I write at her request to state her desire and intention. I shall be very sorry to part with her; but I really cannot stand in the way of the happiness of so good a girl."

Mrs. Hexham called Freda and Arthur, and read the letter to them. "This must be our good Biddy," she said; "though I had no idea that her name was Mary."

"Yes, it is, mamma," replied Freda: "she once told me and Arthur, when you were out and she came up to lay the cloth for dinner. She was a native, she said, of the county Wicklow, and her name was Mary O'Roone. Mrs. Gunn, our landlady, would not call her Mary, because her own

daughter was named Mary Ann, so she christened her Biddy, and by that name she went."

"It is really a curious circumstance, and particularly as we shall so soon want a housemaid in Milly's place. I will go and speak to Mrs. Forbes at once. Nothing would please me better than to have our good Biddy, *alias* Mary, here; as, but for her untiring kindness, I should have died in the solitude of that London lodging; for you were not then with me, dear Freda, as you know."

Mrs. Hexham went and consulted Forbes at once, with the result that Mary's mistress, and Mary herself, were written to that very evening; and in her letter to the latter Mrs. Hexham enclosed a five-pound note to pay the good girl's journey to Ireland. She was to send word when she could come; and then the way she must take would be pointed out, and the fourgon sent across the hills to meet her at the place where the stage-coach stayed. A letter fixing the date soon came in reply; and, as Mary's arrival would be two days before that appointed for Milly's departure to her friends at Islandmore, the arrangement was convenient to all concerned.

Tidings soon came that Mary had set out on her journey; and the fourgon being sent, the children took holiday that afternoon, and went on their ponies to meet it on its return. It came in sight amid the wild yet beautiful hills about two miles from Morr, and, the coachman drawing up his horses for the picturesque little cavalcade to approach, the children saw a pretty well-dressed young woman alight and come running towards them. As soon as she stayed, she began curtsying, and then she burst into tears, and seized Arthur and Freda's hands and began kissing them fervently.

"Oh, me darlints, me darlints!" she said; "to think this beautiful day should ivir come! Me in ould Ireland agin! and me Miss Freda, and me Miss Iole, and me Masther

Arthur before me wid their swate faces,—the young gintlemin that used to play me thricks and make me laugh ; though me heart was sad with Misthress Gunn's scolding, and the nades of the gintlefolks upstairs and down."

"Well, Biddy, or rather Mary, I shall play you tricks again, no doubt, now we've got you here. But we're all very glad to see you, and Mrs. Hexham will be especially so. Biddy, your brogue isn't so broad as when we left you last year ; and you don't look as you used to do, when warm from Misthress Gunn's lovely compliments."

"Hush, Arthur," said Freda ; "let Mary forget that miserable past." And, to turn the subject, the young girl admired Mary's neat and appropriate dress, and complimented her thereon.

"The lady I've been living with bought it for me, Miss Freda, with some of the money Misthress Hexham sint. A swate lady, me late misthress, and one I would have lived wid to the ind of time but for the swater misthress here, and ould Ireland. Och ! me heart is mighty glad to be wid ye all—that it is."

So saying, the bright, glad creature, so changed and happy, moved to the pony on which Iole sat, and caressed her tenderly. Then she was introduced to the rest—Walter, Lucy, Harold, and pretty Kathie, who now occupied a little basket seat on a pony of her own. This was led by a long rein either by Arthur or Walter. For this lovely child, with her lustrous Irish eyes, Mary had no words too tender. But the coachman and other servants could not stay, so Mary resumed her seat in the fourgon, and Iole and Freda took places beside her. Arthur and Harold led their ponies ; and the latter added to the girls' chatter as he rode on, for the roadway was lined on either side by mountain turf, so that neither wheels nor hoofs made a discordant or obliterating noise.

"And plase, Miss Freda and Masther Arthur, where's me Bob?" said Mary presently : "me heart's hungering to know."

"Oh ! he's a scoundrel, Biddy, though it may give you trouble to learn it. Bob loves high company ; he's taken to lords and ladies. Not far off where we live is a fine castle, with real ladies in it. Almost as soon as we reached Morr last year, he wandered there, and there—with but an occasional visit to the Grange—he has remained ever since. I saw him at a distance a while ago, and he was then tucked up on the end of a velvet couch by a window. Bob's a heartless truant, Biddy, and Freda and I are about to find a successor."

"Oh, Masther Arthur and the Miss Freda, no cat in ould Ireland will be like the pretty crathur Bob. He'll be coming home to you all jist now ; for cats have their humours and fancies like the rist of us."

"We won't have him, Biddy ; and as for Lufy, she's a truant too."

"You don't mane it, Masther Arthur ; you're surely joking !"

"Only a little, Mary," interposed Freda. "The dog is really from home just now, and has been for some time. Mamma goes much to the castle to model, and Lufy with her. Lately she has stayed there altogether ; for Doric, Lady Isabel's Isle of Skye dog, is very fond of her, and some weeks ago she had a little family of four of the loveliest pups in the world. Mamma has brought them all home twice in the carriage with her for us to see ; but they are taken back again, as the Ladies Clare like to have the mother and her family among their other dogs, of all of which they are very fond."

"The purty thing !" said Mary ; "but the Misthress Hexham must not part with her. She rarely stirred from off the

bed when she lay so ill, and seemed so glad when the mistress could pat her head and say kind words once more."

When the carriage reached the Grange, Mrs. Hexham had not as yet returned from her day's work at the castle, so Mary was shown by Freda into Mrs. Forbes' room, and thence she went into the kitchen to speak to Milly, Dina and Joyce. Tea in the kitchen followed, and by the time that in the dining-room was ready Mrs. Hexham returned. Mary had now changed her gown, and looked very brisk and smart; and, hurrying to meet "her lady," gave way to a boundless expression of joy. Mrs. Hexham thought the girl very much improved; her brogue was softened, and her former looks of harassment and fear had fled.

"So you are really glad to come to us, Mary, and to old Ireland?" said Mrs. Hexham, when the girl's excitement had a little spent itself. "It is a lovely country, and I think you will like your new home."

"To be wid you and Miss Freda and Miss Iole and Masther Arthur will be a great joy to me. I have lift a most tinder mistress—a dear swate lady—but yet not so dear to me as you, Mistress Hexham. You was so good to me in those dark days wid Mistress Gunn and the many lodgers."

"And you on your part were very good to me, Biddy—or, as I must say, Mary. But for you and your tender care I fear I should have died. We will, however, talk of these matters another time. The bell has rung for tea, and I must make haste. This evening you may rest, but to-morrow your duties must begin, for Milly leaves the day after."

"I am not tired, Mistress Hexham: joy lightens my foot and hand. I will come up and help you, and then serve at table as I ought."

Tea was begun and proceeding, when Milly, coming in from

the kitchen, said, "If you please, ma'am, Pat and his grandfather are both here. Pat wishes to speak to Master Arthur about the goats, and Mike has brought up the sea-weeds you asked him for."

"Yes, to copy. Let him sit down ; I will speak to him presently."

Mary waited at table, and Milly went to and fro to the kitchen. As the latter opened the door from without, to bring in a fresh plate of teacakes, the sound of the old fisherman's voice from the distant kitchen was audible, and Mary hearing it, stopped short and listened. The colour fled from her face ; but no one observing her, and the door being closed, she presently resumed her duties. Then it came to her turn to go forth with a jug ; and the moment after a great cry arose, and all at the table were startled. Some one must have fallen in a fit, for there were low cries and tender and imploring words.

"What *is* the matter?" said Mrs. Hexham ; "Mary or Milly must have fainted."

The elder boys ran out ; and Arthur, soon returning, said wonderingly, "It is only just this,—that old Mike is Mary's father, and Pat her nephew. She has fainted, and Mike is crying over her, and calling her 'my dear, dear dochter.'"

"How strange ! how surprising !" said Mrs. Hexham ; "we must go at once to the kitchen. Mike had told me that he was a native of the county Wicklow, and Mary had mentioned that she came from thence also ; but I never dreamed that in bringing this good girl here, I should unite honest old Mike to his long-lost daughter. What happiness to have done this service !"

They all forgot their meal, and hurried into the kitchen, where Milly and Pat were supporting the senseless girl, and the old father was kissing her face and brow and hands, with the air of a man beside himself."

"Me Mary—me dochter—me tinder thing! Oh! how I've prayed to see ye,—and ye've come. Me swate girl, me darlint, what will me poor old misthress say to this! And what will we do for the swate lady, the Misthress Hexham, who's brought her to us over the say, the saints be blissid?"

"It is indeed a joy, Mike," said the lady, "and your good old wife must be sent for; but we must first think of Mary. Freda, fetch my smelling-bottle, and you, Milly, call Forbes. The girl must lie down. Let her rest on this long seat. Once recumbent, she will soon recover."

They bathed the girl's temples, and chafed her hands, and put hartshorn to her nose, and Mary was soon herself again. Then followed more weeping, and many words of mutual joy.

"To think of it," repeated the old fisherman again and again: "me a sad ould farder this morning widout a dochter, and before night wid the beautifulest and tinderrest the world holds!"

"And what about your wife, Mike? She must know without loss of time."

"Shure she must, me lady."

"Shall Pat get out the pony carriage, and drive you and Mary to the cabin at once, or——"

"Nay, me lady; there must be priparation, or she'll drop down like a stone. The ould misthress's heart is bad, the Dochter sid, and a grate fright won't do for her."

"Well, go yourself, Mike. You'll know what it will be best to say,—none so well as you."

"That's the thruth, Misthress Hexham. I'll go and take me darlint wid me, and me little Pat. They'll stay widout the cabin, and I'll go in; and I'll say, 'Me mourvreen, the saints have heard yer prayers, and sint ye a grate and wonderful blissing; and ye needn't flurry and worry, but jist take it wid the gentle grace wid which it has been

sint.' Then I'll presently go out and bring me darling dochter in ; and the little family from county Wicklow will be alone wid each other, and can spake their joys and troubles to each other wid thruth and tinderness. And, because me dochter goes to-night to see her tinder mother, she'll not be wanting in her duty to you, me lady."

"I am sure of it, Mike. Your Mary has been the best of friends to me. Let her stay all to-morrow with you, and return the next morning ; but Pat must come back, if possible, to-night.

"He shall, me lady. We'll go now ; me heart is hungering to see me Mary under me cabin roof." And as they all preferred to walk across the headland, and Mary was by this time better, the old father and his child and grand-child at once set forth, with the hearty blessing of the whole household.

Pat returned at a late hour ; and next morning gave a very touching description of the meeting between his old grandmother and aunt. The former, he said, "went right off into a grate fit at once," and wouldn't believe it was her "dochter." But, by-and-by, Mary's pretty face and tender words convinced her that it was, "the saints be blissed, the purtiest girl in all Ireland," and no intangible ghost ; so she feasted her eyes upon her face, and drew her to the blazing hearth, and there holding this dear daughter's hands, felt that God had greatly blessed her and old Mike.

Mary returned home the next evening, and the morning following Milly was fetched away by her lover and his father. In the succeeding week she was married, amid great festivities in Islandmore. Mrs. Hexham, Forbes, and Mary, as well as the children, rode and drove over to see the ceremony and carry some charming presents ; and, after partaking of a feast spread out for them, returned through the woods to Morr in the waning sunset of a glorious evening.

Other surprises followed during the next week. While at dinner, Mrs. Hexham being at home that day, the sound of wheels was heard in the courtyard ; and Mary, hurrying in, brought two visiting cards, on which were inscribed the names of " Mr. and Mrs. Desmond, Limerick." The visitors were shown into the drawing-room ; and Mrs. Hexham, repairing thither, found there the pleasant intelligent gentleman whose acquaintance she had made in the stage-coach, his wife, and four children : two boys and two girls about the ages of Arthur, Freda, Walter, and Iole. Mr. Desmond was again visiting the district to see the mines in which he had a share, and " feeling an interest," as he said, " in Mrs. Hexham and her charge," had ventured to come so far as Morr, and bring his wife and elder children with him. Mrs. Desmond was a refined and intelligent lady, so that Mrs. Hexham was at once at home with her. Treating her and her husband as old friends, she led the way to the dining-room, where fresh viands were at once served, and a merry hour spent at table. With the easy freemasonry of youth, the children were soon acquainted ; and shortly after dessert appeared, being permitted to do so, they all ran off to the sea-shore for a merry hour's play amid the rocks which led to the smugglers' cave.

In giving some slight account of her life at Morr, and the various artistic labours which filled up her days, Mrs. Hexham was reticent as to all which related to the castle and the Ladies Clare, except that at their desire she went much there to model. The subject of her work she did not refer to ; but she said that a very costly and rare block of marble had been purchased in Italy, and was now on its way to England, from whence it would be sent to Dublin. Her next want, she added, would be a competent mason, or in preference a man accustomed to work in a sculptor's studio in preparing, chipping, and working blocks of stone and marble ; and she asked Mr. Desmond if he knew of such

a one. He would have to come to Castle Morr and work under her directions for some months ; but he would be liberally treated and well paid. To Mrs. Hexham's great satisfaction, Mr. Desmond knew of precisely such a man as she wanted. He worked in an ordinary stonemason's yard ; but he was industrious, and studied in the Limerick School of Design, and at leisure times had sculptured several pretty figures, which had brought him into considerable notice among his townspeople. His name was Felix Devillin ; he was young and still unmarried, and just the man, Mr. Desmond thought, who would ably effect the service needed. He promised as soon as he returned home to speak to him, and see if he would object to spend a few months at Castle Morr.

This subject of sculpture led to that of painting ; and Mrs. Hexham, in her customary simple and modest way, spoke of the fine lake and mountain scenery she had sketched, and that of the desolate wild coast to the north of Castle Morr. She described the "Devil's Net," the "Witches' Cauldron," and "Timber Cove" ; and that Mr. Desmond might better imagine the awful and dangerous solitudes amid which she had spent so many autumn days, she led the way into her charming studio, where, as she said, were her rough sketches, though not her finished work. That, she said, had nearly all gone to Castle Morr, the Ladies Clare having a generous friend who readily purchased all the pictures she could paint. Mr. Desmond did not wonder at this ; the sketches, as also a few pictures in hand, were masterly in the extreme. Among the latter were two of children, which at once much interested him. The one depicted a pretty dairy with a red tile floor, in which one of two doors and a lattice window stood open, showing the shallow shore of a lake close by, and some steps descending thereto. On these last sat a little child nursing her doll. All round the dairy walls ran

a low shelf formed of large grey slates, and on this stood various shallow pans of red pottery filled with milk. There was a small churn and other dairy appliances under the shelf and upon the floor. Three pretty little girls wearing mob caps and aprons, and with their frocks tucked up, were busy among the milk pans ; for one was skimming off cream, another turning the little churn, and the third cutting up some skin-like substance on an earthen platter. Mr. Desmond saw at a glance, from the likenesses, that the girls were Freda, Iole, and Lucy. The second picture gave a circular room, from the three windows of which, being upper ones, were most charming views of exquisite lake scenery, backed by mountains, woods, and lonely moors. In this picture three boys stood prominent, while a lady sat on a downturned basket on the floor. Two of the former were plastering the walls with what appeared to be some soft cement ; on this the third was placing various tiles prettily painted with birds, butterflies, shells, plants, and seaweeds,—the lady's duty being seemingly to arrange these tiles from a heap on the floor, ready for the third boy's hand. Seeing from the likenesses that Mrs. Hexham and the boys were represented in the picture, Mr. Desmond made inquiry.

“ You have not yet had time to hear of the children's great romance,” Mrs. Hexham answered. “ The boys are building a Robinson Crusoe house on a lovely island on Lough Morr. Arthur, who has always had a sort of mania for house-building, has been the architect ; and considering that he is a mere lad, and has never had instruction of an architectural kind, except so far as mathematics, geometry, and drawing relate thereto, it is really a remarkable sort of place. It has been built of rough stones from the shore, and with very little help except from Pat our boy, old Mike the castle fisherman, and Walter and Harold. Were you going to stay, I would ask you to go with us to the island.”

"Indeed I should like to stay a few days in this lovely neighbourhood," replied Mr. Desmond, eagerly ; "so would my wife, and I need say nothing of the children. To-day, in coming here, we passed through a small village, which I found was called Islandmore. It possesses no inn ; but I was told that bedrooms are sometimes let in one or more respectable cottages ; so that if we could get sleeping accommodation, we might easily drive over here in a morning and return at night."

"I am only sorry we have no bedrooms here," said Mrs. Hexham ; "but with seven children and an additional servant, our rooms are full. For the rest, I am sure that Miss Haller and Dr. Marlow will permit me to give you and Mrs. Desmond and your children hearty welcome ; and your horse, if a good and swift one, would easily accomplish twice a day the few miles between this and Islandmore. I will write a note, and send Pat at once with it. Mr. Miltown, the Ladies Clare's agent, returned last week, after a considerable absence on account of his health. I have not yet seen him ; but he is, I hear, an excellent gentleman, and no doubt he and the sister who keeps his house will give you a cordial Irish welcome. It is, I believe, in remote parts like this, away from villages and inns, the custom to offer the hospitality of the agent's house to strangers."

Shortly after this conversation Pat was despatched on old Jack with a note to Mr. Miltown at Islandmore ; and before the sun went down he returned with an answer offering the most generous hospitality. Meanwhile the children, delighted and happy, were away on the shore ; and Mrs. Hexham, after showing her guests the house, the garden, and the avenue leading towards the headland, took them to the smooth sands below the lawn ; and here, till the sun was sinking and the bell rang for tea, they sat and talked most pleasantly. Mrs. Hexham, among other matters, fully described the children's

isle, and it was settled that her guests should return to the Grange by ten o'clock the following morning, and then with her and the children set off without delay for a long day's pleasure at the island.

Freda, Arthur, and the rest, before they parted for the night with Mr. Desmond's children, had made great friendship with them. The girls' names were Alice and Judith, and the boys' William and Sydney; and the next morning, when they met, they were all vastly delighted, and anticipated a most extraordinarily jolly day. To add to the young Desmonds' delight, when they entered the courtyard they saw there a perfect troop of ponies. There were not only those belonging to Freda, Arthur, and the rest; but four others Denis had been sent for to the castle for them to ride, for a number were always kept in a paddock near at hand for the servants' use. Mrs. Hexham joined Mr. and Mrs. Desmond in their car; and the little company were just about to start, when a young man with a tourist's knapsack swung across his shoulders turned down from the post-road and came towards the gate. He was thus met face to face, and recognised at once by Mrs. Hexham and the children from the Grange as Terence Foyle. He was well dressed, and much improved in looks and manners; and, greeting his friends with great respect, said he had ventured to recollect Mrs. Hexham's kind invitation to the Grange the previous autumn, and, being at home from Dublin for his vacation, had come over to stay a few days if he might. Thereupon Mrs. Hexham cordially welcomed him; but at once explained that herself and her company were just setting out to spend the day on an island in Lough Morr, and if he would like to join them he could do so. Her invitation was readily accepted; and, handing his knapsack to Denis, young Foyle took his place in the car, and the company set off; the vehicle leading the way, and the cavalcade of ponies following.

Passing slowly along the post-road, over which lay the cool morning shadows from the avenue and opposite woodland, the company soon turned down towards the shore, the tide being nearly out, and the sands permitting in this case a passage at the base of the headland. The morning and the scenery were alike most lovely ; the sea shining like a vast maze of silvery light as its waves rolled inshore, while in the distance great masses of shadow lent their contrast. Winding round the headland, and then gradually ascending to the turfy heights beyond, the splendid panorama of lakes and mountain, wood and sea, came into view. The car was stayed, and its occupants turned their gaze from one vision of beauty to another ; Mr. Desmond declaring that, in all his wide range of home and continental travel, he had never seen so many natural beauties so marvellously combined. The children lingered in the rear, for those from the Grange had turned aside to show their little friends the schoolroom in the old tower, and the entrance beyond the park wall to the Hundred Steps.

During the drive from the Grange, Mrs. Hexham told Mr. and Mrs. Desmond and Terence the romantic story of Irish Mary and her relationship to old Mike the castle fisherman ; and saying they would drive to his cabin and then to the pot-work before going to the isle, she pointed out the road. The car thus bore away to the woods, and presently descending towards the little creek, crossed one of its shallows, and so up to the cabin. Mike had just returned from his early morning's fishing, and he and his old wife were taking a meal ; but the moment they heard the sound of wheels, they hurried to the door. The good old mother had been already twice to the Grange, to talk over " th' wonder of me Mary's finding," and to express through tears and smiles and broken speech her absolutely inexpressible gratitude. " To think of it, me lady !" she said again and again ; " for the

Blissid Mother and the saints must have listened to the prayers of me and me ould Mike, so the good Father Doherty says, and brought you here and me Mary too. And that she should have bin good to ye, me lady, in yer illnesses and sorrows and loneliness, is a grate thing, and plases me and me ould Mike more than we can say. Then it is wonderful, we còming all across Ireland from a cabin in the county Wicklow to a cabin in this lonely place, and me Mary knowing nothing of it, and yet coming to us, God-led, as the holy father says, is more than me and me simple Mike can understand. Thin the good dochter—she so loving and so full of tinder words—she comes to us, and she 'is wid you, and that is what plases me and me Mike, me lady. She's no troubles now, me lady, but one, and that she's silent over. But it's about a young sailor she saw in Dublin whin she first wint there to seek a place, before she wint to your country, and to the bad, hard misthress—the Misthress Gunn, sorra be wid her—she had there. But it's a hard trouble, me lady, that hasn't a day for inding; and so me Mary may see her sailor agin, and the good Father Doherty be axed to say the prayers and put on a golden ring."

And in this sort of way she began again, and talked on till breathlessness caused her to cease. Then old Mike took his turn and had his say. When he paused—for it was difficult to stop their torrent of most grateful and heartfelt words—Mrs. Hexham told both that their Mary was well and happy, and that she and the children and the strangers they saw were going to the island to spend some hours. Before crossing there, they would diverge into the woods to see Mrs. Tarra and her children, and on their way thence they would visit the pot-work in order that Mr. Desmond should see the clever results of the labours of Phineas and his father.

The children—all but Kathie—dismounted; and being invited into the cabin by Mike and his wife, they examined

everything with curiosity. There was a finely carved press, as also a chest, a few pictures, and a few odds and ends in pottery and glass on a long shelf. Then they went down to the creek and looked at the great crabs and lobsters and the other results of old Mike's fishing that early morning.

"Shure, Masther Arthur and the Miss Freda," said old Mike, as they and the rest proceeded to remount, "may I be axing if the Misthress Hexham and the rist be going to the ating and drinking at the isle?"

"I don't think there's much there to eat," replied Arthur, who was always a little saucy, "but some eggs and milk, and a poor sort of cheese and butter the girls messed at the other day. Freda is a capital scholar, but I do not think much of her cooking."

"Arthur, how can you tell Mike so! Mrs. Forbes says that our Dina is one of the best dairymaids and cooks she ever knew: and she's been teaching me in our kitchen at home, and has been four times to the isle to show us dairy-work. How can you make Mike believe I am so ignorant! Dina says I am a capital hand at butter, and she says I can make pastry and bread very light, and that I shall soon improve in roasting and boiling." Freda paused here, for she was very indignant.

"Don't mind the young gintleman, Miss Freda," said Mike; "boys is always mischievous and hard to girls. You'll cook purtily, I know, whin you've had the taching. Why I took the liberty of axing, is that me and the ould misthress will hurry wid our work and bile riddy for the ating the biggest lobster and crab the counthry holds—nay, the biggest salmon if——"

"You would have to send a cook, Mike, if you did," plagued Arthur still. "A salmon! why, these girls, though Miss Haller has given them a cooking book, and told Forbes to teach them, and sent them caps and aprons, and pots and

pans, and a dozen other things, could not cook a minnow ; and as for sauce, why——”

“ Please don’t, Arthur,” interrupted Freda, still angrily.

“ There, ride away, young masther,” spoke Mike ; “ the Miss Freda will learn cooking in time ; old heads ain’t put on young shoulders without a dale of taching, and the likes of me don’t like laughing out of place.” So Arthur, finding he had no ally in old Mike against Freda, shook his pony’s reins, and led the way up the swarded upland towards the dense woodland into which Mr. Desmond’s car had already passed.

It was a forest rather than a wood ; for though alternated with stretches of bog and moor, it extended in breadth and length many miles over the country. It was composed principally of beech trees, intermingled with oaks and larch ; and these showing the finest leafage of the full summer, shed down cool and pleasant shadows on the sward and undergrowth below. Wide glades opened into this forest here and there ; and entering the one the car had followed, they were soon beneath the cool shade of the high leafy arch above, the ponies treading almost silently over the fairest turf, and ferns, flowers, and little trickling springs, varying and lending brightness to the undergrowth on either side. The glade ending in a wide opening full of rich summer sunlight more or less flecked by shadows, the little troop of equestrians saw before them the keeper’s lodge, and at the door Mr. Desmond’s car. The potter’s wife with her younger children stood without, talking in such English as she possessed to Mrs. Hexham about Phineas ; and her first words as they caught the ear gave evidence that she comprehended in some degree the value of the instruction that lady was bestowing on him, and the happiness it conferred.

“ Me boy can’t slape at nights for thinking of ye, me lady,” she said ; “ and he’s always drawing, and scratching, and

thinking of the wonderful things he'll do for ye and the little masthers in the way of th' tiles and the pots."

"Your Phineas, Mrs. Tarra, is indeed a very good and clever boy, and it gives me the highest pleasure to instruct him. I only hope your husband will agree to settle in this neighbourhood, for the clays are both good and plentiful, and fuel is in abundance. Dr. Marlow says that the Ladies Clare's agent, Mr. Miltown, can find him plenty of common work, and the good ladies themselves say that their house-keeper shall buy pots and pans for the household."

"The blissing of all the saints be on ye, me lady, and all the other ladies at th' grate castle! It was a good day's work for me masther when he came here. Stay! why, that he will, and me and the childer too. Haven't we this nice cottage, and good Masther Mike and his ould mistress for neighbours? and don't they give me a fish for axing, and milk whin our cow be dry? They're nice neighbours, me lady, and I'll be no laving here, if you so please."

"It will please me for you all to stay, Mrs. Tarra," replied Mrs. Hexham; "and we will find your husband work, be sure of that. And I hope before long a school will be established somewhere near the castle, so that your children can go to and fro with less difficulty than to Islandmore. Now I am going on to show this lady and gentleman all the pretty works your husband and Phineas are doing for the children's island-house."

The car went onwards; but the children alighted and stayed a little while, for Arthur and Walter had questions to ask about Trick and his habits of thieving, and Freda and Iole wished to see some of the crochet work for which the two elder girls were famous. They wrought it for a large manufacturing house in Dublin, of which an agent lived in a country town a good many miles away across the hills. It was dirty-looking stuff, more green than black in colour; but

the patterns and work were alike beautiful. The same gifts which made Phineas a most artistic potter, even before he had had any but the rudest instruction, had caused these girls to be most dexterous with crochet hook and thread. No pattern seemed to be too intricate for them to effect, and no work too fine—whether it was that of exquisite lace, collars, or cuffs. They had each only had a few weeks' instruction in a nun's school a long way off, and yet they were working industriously like true artists, and by this means aiding considerably towards the support of the household. Miss Haller and Mrs. Hexham had already bought specimens of their work, and ordered more ; and Freda and the other girls watched their dexterous fingers with great curiosity, determining as they did so to gain some instruction, if only to make a few articles for the island-house. Arthur called such things "messes," and "rubbish," but this they did not care for.

Tarra's pot-work was beautifully situated on the top of a grassy slope with a bounteous spring gushing into a natural basin of rock close by. It was hidden from the sight of the castle by a bend in the woodland ; but a stone's throw in front of it the exquisite scenery of the lakes came into view, and their various windings as they penetrated into the hills and were lost in distance. The father and son, and the man who helped them, were found diligently at work—the last preparing the strips of clay, Tarra moulding the tiles, and Phineas, guided by drawings to scale before him, cutting the necessary incisions, and then filling them up with different coloured clays. There was such an air of hope and happiness in the faces of both father and son, as to be most pleasant to behold ; and their general appearance was also greatly changed for the better, for Dr. Marlow had sent them a bundle of old clothes, and Forbes had looked them up many things belonging to the boys. These, by the aid of the

tailor at Islandmore, had been transformed into serviceable garments both for Sundays and working-days ; and few who had seen the poor, ragged, dispirited, lonely creatures in the early spring, would have recognised them now. So much does a little good fortune improve the worthy.

Several small stacks of finished tiles were heaped upon the floor ; and Mr. Desmond, examining them, was much surprised, and still more so with several trial pieces for a simple frieze or border to crown the walls at the point nearest the ceiling. Phineas had taken the idea from one of the books Mrs. Hexham had shown him, and he had been making experiments ever since. The grounds of these long tiles were chiefly black, with raised figures in very dark red, though in a few other colours had been employed.

After some conversation with Tarra, the company, who had previously alighted, left the car and ponies in the potter's care ; and, taking Phineas with them, went onward towards the lake ; every hillock in the undulating upland, as they crowned it, bringing into view some new and lovely aspects of water, shore, island, mountain, moorland, and wood. They crossed over to the isle by the little bridge resting on the ancient piles ; and, stepping round a rich fringe of trees that dipped into the lake, saw before them the pretty rustic-looking house at which the boys had now laboured so long and industriously.

The grey, rough and weather-beaten stones with which it was built, gave it a simple yet picturesque appearance. The ground floor and upper floor were of only reasonable height ; and thus the whole elevation was not great—the only exception being the eastern tower, which rose higher than the other in order to give a view away to the ocean over the lowest portion of the grassy upland ; this last being, as already said, so low—a mere sandy bar covered with turf—as to be open to the ocean in cases of great storms. Traditions

existed of some few of these ; the last occurring at the end of the eighteenth century, when several of the lakes and much of the land around was for some days a wide and troubled sea.

From the pretty rustic porch, with a seat on each side, opened the front door into the lower room or gallery, with a large window on either side, and an oriel window opposite, commanding a view over the far part of the lake, as it narrowed extremely, and as a mere brooklet joined the lake beyond. This room, which rather curved or bent itself to the shore, had its tile floor laid down and all its woodwork finished ; but the walls were as yet only partially covered, the process of making so many tiles being necessarily a slow one. However, enough was finished to show what the effect of the whole would be. These formed rather large square panels ; the raised parts being a Pompeian red, the ground dark blue with a beading of black around it. Each line of panels was a shade lighter as it progressed towards the ceiling, and there it was finished by a moulding, in which black, red, and various-toned blues were intermingled.

This room or gallery, which was about twenty-five feet long by fifteen wide, was to be used as a sort of museum—in which would be arranged all the odds and ends the children had already gathered, and such others as they might collect as time wore on ; these including waifs and strays from the sea-shore, from ruins, caves, and other places. Mrs. Hexham promised to paint them some pictures to hang in the panels ; and the boys intended to make tables, as also what might be called cabinets or movable cupboards—the pretty cabinet which the Ladies Clare had sent them, and which Arthur and Walter had repaired and re-lined, being already here. The children had also leave to take away any odds and ends of furniture which might be useful from the store-room in the old tower ; and they intended to set plants and

flowers, mosses and ferns, about the place in pots and baskets Phineas would make for them.

From the ends of the gallery opened a door into each of the towers ; and in these were two doors apiece, leading alike to an outer staircase built in the angle of the tower and gallery wall, and into two most pleasant rooms—that to the south-east being some feet longer than that to the south-west. Both rooms were finished by an oriel somewhat differently placed—that in the south-east filling up the whole end, that in the south-west standing from the end a little in the rear, overlooking the garden and a long line of trees which just there fringed the isle. This latter, being nearest the kitchen, was to be the dining-room ; the larger room at the other end of the gallery was for a parlour or library. The floors and walls of these were not yet begun. From the left-hand tower some steps descended into the kitchen, scullery, and larder ; and beneath the south-east tower was the dairy.

By building the two staircases in the angles formed by the outer walls and the towers much space was saved, and these staircases, made light and airy by numerous small windows, opened pleasantly into the upper rooms ; the central one being a charming repetition of that below, with the exception that there were two oriels built out from it instead of one. The rooms on either hand were equally pleasant ; the larger to the right being intended for the girls' bedroom, that to the left for the boys'. Within the right-hand tower were a few steps ascending to the roof ; and here, overlooking the upland, the lake, the woods, the ocean, and the far-stretching wild and rocky shore, the scenery was fine and varied in the extreme.

Mrs. Hexham explained that for this right-hand upper room she was painting by degrees a set of tiles with copies of subjects of natural history common to the neigh-

bourhood, and such as they saw daily in their journeys and walks. Thus there would be birds, insects, fish, shells, seaweeds, mosses, plants, and many other things. These would not be arranged in any formal manner—that is to say, a bird on one tile, a plant on another, and so on—but prettily grouped and put together. It was to be called the “Naturalist’s Room.” The boys were beginning to paint the tiles for their own room with all manner of devices from heraldic books they had. This was to be called the “Herald’s Room,”—and though Mrs. Hexham would have preferred other subjects than the signs of a barbarous past, yet she truly said “boys would be boys,” and that the varied colours of their designs would, when together, look very well.”

But all the best art and labour were to be expended on the upper gallery. As time wore on, Mrs. Hexham hoped to paint for its decoration various pictures on large tiles of the children’s life at Morr, of which there were incidents enough, as our little chronicle has already shown. At present only the timber floors of these upper rooms were laid, other wood-work done, and the walls plastered ; though, when these last were dry, it was intended to bring the rooms into use. All the children anticipated many delightful hours in this upper gallery, with its wide and pleasant oriel windows looking away up the chain of lakes till lost in the shadows of the hills. Here they would bring their books, paint their tiles, mend fishing-tackle, write, and do much other work of varied kinds.

Returning by the stairs of the eastern tower, Mrs. Hexham showed the visitors the pretty dairy, with its milk-pans and other accessories in red earthenware. That Mr. Desmond might see that the subject of the little picture he had so much admired was not an imaginary one, she made Freda, Iole and Lucy tuck up their frocks put on their mob-caps and aprons, and go through a portion of their dairy-work.

Freda skimmed the cream off the milk, Iole and Lucy turned the churn, and then all three helped to wash and make up the butter, which they did in pretty pats. Every one present commended the little maids, and declared that they had "never seen anything nicer in all their lives."

Having to clean up the dairy and put things in order—for Dina had taught them the absolute necessity of great cleanliness—the girls remained ; but the boys led the company up some steps by the eastern tower to the pretty flower garden lying in various parts about the house. Then they showed the orchard they had planted the previous autumn, and five other various-sized plots of ground marked out as fields by low fences. Of these, one was planted with vetches for the goats, another with potatoes, and the remaining three lay in ridges preparatory to the autumn sowing with wheat and barley ; two with the former, one with the latter.

Phineas had accompanied Mrs. Hexham and her friends in their visit to the house, in order to answer some inquiries Mr. Desmond wished to make. This business over, he had been at once permitted to go, in order that he might fish and enjoy his holiday ; and now the other boys, eager to join him, ran off too—first going to the house, where in one of the lower tower-rooms some of their fishing-tackle was kept. As they ran past the dairy, Freda came out and called Arthur back. He obeyed reluctantly, as she could see.

"Don't be cross, Arthur," she said ; "I only want to ask you a question. All the girls are so hungry, and so must be mamma and Mrs. Desmond. There is plenty of butter and good cream ; and a large dishful, I know, of our late strawberries. If we look, perhaps we may find raspberries ripe enough. Don't you think we might have some luncheon ? Old Mike promised to bring us a nice large crab or lobster. No doubt he will be here directly with it."

"Have you any bread ?"

"No," replied poor Freda dolefully ; "but there are biscuits."

"Biscuits ! Whoever heard of such a thing as biscuits with crab or lobster ! There, I can't stay now. I hear the boys calling. Phineas, who is a capital hand at fishing, may have caught a trout."

He was going, when Freda hurried forward and grasped his hand.

"Do stay, Arthur. Perhaps we can borrow some bread of Mike's wife, or of Mrs. Tarra. It would be so nice to give the people luncheon. I will send off Pat at once to ask. Where is he?"

"He went off to the Grange quite an hour ago, for I saw mamma move aside to speak to him, and then old Jack was saddled. Perhaps Forbes has prepared luncheon, and he has gone to help Denis to bring it here."

"That's just it," replied Freda gladly. "It is so like Forbes to think of all our wants. I will go and lay a cloth on the grass at once, and get the other girls to gather the fruit. But I have something else to say to you, Arthur, only I fear you will laugh."

"I shall probably do so. "What is it?"

"Don't, please, Arthur. It is all my own thought, and yet a secret, except to Iole. Why, why,—well, I mean that I should like us children to dine here. I don't mean a dinner which grown-up people would help us to cook and then to eat ; but for us to cook it, and eat it, and be all by ourselves. We would, of course, have all the Desmond children, and Pat and Phineas, but nobody else."

"Yes, if possible, such a thing would be jolly ; but everything would be messed. You can't cook, Freda !"

"I *can* !" replied Freda indignantly. "Dina has shown me how to roast and boil, and make pastry, sweets, and bread ; I am quite sure that if Miss Haller and mamma

will permit us to have a dinner, everything would be *very* nice."

"I'm sure it wouldn't," said Arthur, whose humour just then was to tease, for he wanted to go; "everything would be a mess. The custard would be quaky, the pastry burnt, and the meat, if there was any, all raw. So, would such a mess be a dinner?"

"Arthur! how can you talk so? If you have been building this house so cleverly, I have been taking pains to learn how to keep it. It is so cruel of you; for I never tease you." She dropped his hand as she spoke, and turned away with her eyes full of tears.

The heart of the self-willed boy was touched. He was very fond of this good sister, for she was always so tender to him. He followed her, drew her back, put his arms about her neck, and kissed her with great love. "There, don't cry, Fre," he said; "you know I like to tease you, and yet to please you. That's just it."

At this moment Walter returned. "Arthur, what are you staying for? Phin has caught a wonderful trout—the largest I ever saw! Do make haste, and let us begin fishing; we may be as lucky." Then, as he came nearer, seeing Freda with her eyes still full of tears, he knew Arthur had been vexing her. Under all circumstances, Walter took Freda's part, for they were great friends; so in a moment, forgetful of his immediate purpose, he called out, "Arthur! how can you? I will turn to, one day, and pummel you heartily if you don't give up teasing Freda. What is the matter, Fre?"

"Why, I spoke to him about our all having some luncheon. Then I told him of what I had been thinking. I want us children to have a dinner-party of our own; to be by ourselves, both to cook and eat it."

"A capital thought!" replied Walter; "I like it immensely. We will have this dinner."

"But," answered Freda hesitatingly, "Arthur says I cannot cook—that I shall burn the pastry and spoil the meat."

"Oh, nonsense! I'm sure that you and Iole are capital hands; and Lucy can help. What shall we have?"

"Let us go and sit upon the grass, and talk this dinner over; for, as the Desmonds go so soon, there is no time to lose," said Freda.

The two boys obeyed her wish, and followed her when she rose, though Arthur would rather have gone off to his fishing. They went up the steps by the south-eastern tower to a charming spot beneath the trees, overlooking the lake and the castle lawn on the other shore.

"The first thing to do," said Freda, "is to ask leave of Miss Haller and mamma. Then we must think of what we can have. All we eat must, so far as possible, belong to the isle. We can have a dish of trout and melted butter with ketchup; and I can make two or three raspberry and currant pies, and two large custards, besides plenty of strawberries and cream. I can think of nothing else, unless it be peas and potatoes."

"Nothing else!" exclaimed Arthur; "what do you mean? We can have a couple of ducks and a couple of fowls. Pat will soon wring their necks."

"Arthur, what a horrible thought! I couldn't eat a bit of our ducks and fowls, for I should be thinking of the pretty creatures swimming and pecking about one hour, and the next dead, their bodies stiff and their pretty feathers dabbled in blood. It cannot be. Better no dinner than such a cruel thing."

"It will not be cruel," said Walter. "There are plenty more, besides the broods of chickens and four hens sitting, and I don't know how many ducks of different ages. So if we do not eat them, they will eat us. What is more, I

would have a joint of kid's flesh ; Mike says it is good eating, and that one of the two kids Shavy had last ought to be killed."

"I really cannot bear this !" exclaimed Freda. "If we cannot have a dinner without killing our pets, I will say no more."

"You reason, Freda, like a girl," spoke Arthur in his peremptory way. "Every day you eat meat for dinner, and to procure it some animal must have been slain. Why is it worse to kill a duck or a fowl, and then eat it? I was reading the other day that the death of animals from old age is always a very sad one ; and that if we allowed them to multiply without limit—that is without any being killed—there would soon be no food for them to eat."

"Yes : I understand that what both you and Walter say is reasonable," said the girl ; "but then our pretty pets, with their lovely plumage, and their enjoyment of life ! The thought of taking away their lives is really dreadful to me." She shuddered as she spoke, and covered her face with her hands.

Even children have to face the problems of life, and this of the contest between good and evil was an instance.

"Well," said Arthur kindly, "you and the other girls shall not be worried about this part of the business : leave it all to me and Walter. Get mamma's leave, and make the pies and puddings, and the rest shall go all right. Only one thing,—don't mess the cooking. If I have burnt pie, squashed peas, and oily melted butter, I shall eat no dinner."

Freda did not hear these last words, or she would have been indignant. She was thinking with sorrow of the pretty pets, and their congenial home in the island, for she knew from Arthur's words that, if there was a dinner, there would be roast duck and roast fowl.

Pat, who had been seeking them, now came running up to

say that they were all wanted. He had been to the Grange, and, returning with Denis, had brought ample materials for a capital lunch. Thus summoned, they hurried off to the lawn, and found the cloth not only laid, but on it spread cold meat, tarts, sweets, and fruit. Mrs. Hexham presided, while Mr. Desmond and Terence carved and made themselves useful.

Previously, and during their leisurely walk round the lovely island, Mrs. Hexham, as also Mr. and Mrs. Desmond, had had much conversation with Terence—with the result that they were all three greatly pleased with his unaffected good manners, his extreme modesty, and his real love of learning. The two former, remembering, scarcely fifteen months previously, the poor abashed shabbily-dressed youth they had met in the country coach, could scarcely realise that this was one and the same, so great was the alteration. Mr. Desmond questioned him as to his future intentions and prospects, but all he could elicit was that he would not be a priest, or a farmer at Laragh. He thought he would go out to California to his brother Ambrose and turn gold-digger, or open a store, or keep a school; for Ambrose had said "education was the great thing needed." But his brother was growing rich, and might return to the contentment of an Irish farmer's life of an improved kind, and "in that case," said Terence, "I do not know what I should do. Of only one thing I am sure: I should love my books and be a student, be my calling what it might."

"Well," replied Mr. Desmond; "if such good fortune should come as that of your brother returning from the western states of America a wealthy man, even if comparatively so, and he should take the true patriot's part of spending his gains in his native country (a duty much wanted), and you have doubts as to what course to follow, come to me in Limerick, and as a practical man I may be able to open

some remunerative employment to you—that is to say, provided there be industry, intelligence, and zeal.” Terence thanked Mr. Desmond, and said he would bear his kind advice in memory.

Lunch was scarcely begun before old Mike was seen crossing the grass from towards the bridge. He had kept his word of “boiling the beautifulest and gratest crab and lobster in ould Ireland.” The twain now lay on a large dish, which bearing in his hands, he placed reverently before Mrs. Hexham.

“There, me lady, if ye’ll be ixcipting th’ crathurs. Frish they are, and nice they are, and very swate you’ll find ’im.”

“It is very good of you and your old wife, Mike; but—but——” and Mrs. Hexham’s eyes fell on the dish. “What is this, Mike, and where did it come from?”

“Me ould misthress, me lady, has a few paces of the same. Whin we lived in the county Wicklow, an ould woman who lived in a cabin hard by, and in her day had bin maid in a grate Irish family in Dublin, lift thim to me ould misthress for th’ tinder care she giv’ her in illness and dying. Me childer, whin small, played some pranks amid ’im, but there’s enough for ye to look at whin ye’re nixt riding by.”

“Thank you, Mike. It is really a very lovely dish,—one made by a great English potter named Josiah Wedgwood, who lived a long while ago.” Then she turned to her visitors and the children, and added: “Observe its fine form, colour, and glaze, and then its pattern. How lovely it is!—and, copied originally from the border of a classical vase, it is known as ‘the red and black antique.’ It is really charming.”

The luncheon proceeded; and the next things which won admiration were the strawberries, raspberries, and the fine milk and cream. For, owing to the recent churning, the

latter was rather scarce, but "the new milk" was, as Mrs. Desmond said, "a perfect treat."

Luncheon over, the boys carried some to Phineas, and joined him in his fishing. Tired of this, by-and-by they crossed to the shore, and hunted amid the branches of the dipping trees for the boat Mike occasionally used, but they could find it nowhere. They then returned to the isle and questioned Pat, who presently confessed that his grandfather had removed it some time before, by the order of Dr. Marlow. Arthur and Walter, as also did Freda, guessed the reason why, though they kept silence thereon. The boys then got their bats and played cricket with William and Sydney Desmond, who were excellent players, and, calling Phineas, kindly showed him the game. Pat meanwhile boiled the kettle, and the girls set the tea-things; and over this pleasant meal Mrs. Hexham told Mr. Desmond much of Kathie's history, for both he and his wife greatly admired the beautiful child; and the first added that Dr. Marlow had already placed the papers connected with her father's estates in the hands of the Ladies Clare's solicitors in London, and those gentlemen were of opinion that a sufficient sum would be eventually secured to afford her a handsome independent income.

Thus the afternoon and beautiful evening passed, and the time came to return to the Grange. As arranged, the elder Tarra and one of his boys brought the ponies and car as far as the shore; and the company were about to mount when, to Arthur's inquiry, the potter said Trick had returned from the woods bringing another magpie with him. After hunting about the keeper's cottage for his old cage, he seemed to recollect that it hung outside the kitchen door of the island-house. So Pat was despatched to see if he was safe—as sure enough he was. He was found on his perch with a Mrs. Magpie close beside him. Pat fastened him in, and returned to make his report, though with little hope that he would be

there in the morning, for, always a wanderer, he now never settled anywhere for long, but roved about, as the children said, "a perfect mystery and mischief in feathers." Sometimes he was at the Castle, sometimes at the Grange, then with other magpies in the woods, then he would pay a visit to Tarra's cottage or Mike's cabin; and occasionally he presented himself in the schoolroom while the children were at lessons, stealing their pencils, biting their pens, and, unless prevented, tearing the leaves of their books. He seemed very fond of the children, and when not at the castle was often looking after them. He made them laugh so much that, when he appeared in the schoolroom, Dr. Marlow generally opened one of the windows and let him fly out. On such occasions he rarely flew away, but, perching himself on the sill, would bob his head and wink his eye till work was over. Then he followed them home, or else went to the castle, or to his cage in the island-house. He thus showed such fondness for the children that, in spite of all his oddities and mischievousness, they liked him very much, and soon learnt to call him "dear old Trick."

As soon as they reached the Grange, and Freda could speak to Mrs. Hexham alone, she opened the subject of the "children's dinner-party," the dinner to be cooked and partaken of solely by themselves. The only exceptions were to be Pat and Phineas, who were to help and share the dinner. Mrs. Hexham, duly considering the point, could see no objection to this proposal, except that of the girls' inability to cook, and the fear of accidents. "As to the last," she said, "you might upset the saucepans and set yourselves on fire. And as to cooking, you will find that to make a pie or roast meat under the supervision of a skilled person is one thing, and to do it by yourselves is another. Raw meat and burnt meat would be nasty things to present to the young Desmonds, and so would be underdone or overdone

vegetables. The best thing, I think, for you to do, is to let Pat and Denis take you a good supply of viands ; while the gathering of the fruit and the laying of the cloth would give you occupation enough."

"All this would be nice, mamma, but it is not what we *mean*," replied Freda, a little ruefully. "I and the other girls would like to do the cooking, and have the kitchen all to ourselves. Arthur is very naughty : he teases me, and says I shall make a break-down, which will live in his memory for ever ; that the meat and the pastry will be burnt, the custards broken, the vegetables all squash. But then you know what a boy he is for teasing. Walter is very good ; he says I and Iole will succeed, and so do all the rest."

"As you please, my dear. None of us know what we can do till we try ; and there is nothing so sure to bring reward as the attempt to begin and continue work. I speak from experience, for none more than I know the blessings and benefits which worthy work always brings. Miss Haller is to pay us a visit this evening, and I will consult her, as also Forbes, in relation to some simple things for cooking."

"But, mamma," replied Freda, "neither is that what we mean. We want, as much as possible, for the isle to supply our meal. True, we have not yet corn, and so cannot have our own flour ; nor shall we ever have sugar, or some other things ; but there is plenty of nice fruit, cream, butter, and eggs. We can have plenty of pies and custards, and a large batter pudding——" Freda stayed her speech abruptly at this point. Her hesitation was obvious.

"What, my dear, are you going to provide only a vegetarian dinner ? You must remember that, including yourself, there will be eleven hungry children at table—I should say *very* hungry children, speaking from my own experience of your appetites. Then of course you will give some dinner

to Pat and Phineas ; and most likely old Mike will be upon the scene. Dina must roast a large piece of meat ; it is absolutely necessary she should do so. When I have consulted Forbes I will ask her to give orders to that effect ; unless, indeed, you would like to have roast ducks and chickens, and in that case——”

“That is the point, mamma,” interrupted Freda, and trembling as she spoke : “that *is* the difficulty. It makes me full of sorrow to think of it. Arthur wants us girls to roast a pair of ducks and a pair of chickens, and to have a large piece of one of Shavy’s last kids. But I cannot think or hear of such a thing. Our ducks look so charming swimming about the lake, and the kids grazing with old Shavy under the trees, that——”

“This is a difficulty we all have to face, Freda ; and the tender sentiment which does your heart so much credit must, I fear, give place to utility. Forbes and Dina have, I assure you, been casting very longing eyes towards your island ducks, and, I may add, fowls also. Better waive all further consideration of this point, and leave it to others. To make pies for eleven hungry children is quite enough for your thoughts and care. Leave the rest.”

There was no time to say more, for Miss Haller had arrived, and Mrs. Hexham had to hasten with her toilet. When she went down to the drawing-room she consulted that lady, who cheerfully replied that there could be no objection to the children dining on the isle, or preparing their dinner in whatever way they pleased. They must, however, be specially requested to make no great noise, nor to show themselves too prominently, as several ladies and gentlemen of high title, relations of the Ladies Clare, were to arrive at the castle that evening for the purpose of spending some days there.

As soon as she could conveniently leave the room, Mrs.

Hexham made her report to the children, who were all greatly pleased, and in an instant a Babel of tongues ensued.

"This will never do," said Arthur in his peremptory way. "There must be order and method, or even the beginning will be a mess ; indeed, as I think, the whole will be. Let us go to the playroom and write down a bill of fare."

They all liked this idea, and ran gleefully off to their room, got forth paper, ink, and pens, and took their places round the table like so many counsellors. Even sweet little Kathie was there.

"Now," said Arthur, as he placed a large sheet of paper before him, "how am I to begin ? Thus, I suppose?—

'CHILDREN'S HOUSE, ISLAND MORR.

'Bill of Fare.

'THURSDAY, AUGUST 4.'"

Then, turning to Freda, he continued, "What ought to go first ? I suppose soup and fish. But I don't vote for soup ; it would only be mess. We might have trout, and Mike would, I daresay, find a respectable salmon and a 'purty' lobster, 'the gratest in ould Ireland.' But to fry and dress these things would be above girls' ability. Now, suppose I write 'Roast kid, ducks, and fowls.'"

"Arthur ! how can you ?" replied Iole and Lucy, who as yet knew nothing of Freda's previous protest ; "I am sure we would all of us rather have no dinner than eat our pretty pets."

Freda gave her assent to this by a sigh and a nod.

"Well, as we are not to have fish, flesh, and fowl, I will put the matter thus—

'Things to be considered of { (Hem !)
'Pastry.

What comes first under this head ?"

"Batter pudding," replied Freda meekly.

"Batter pudding? Why, then you'll want gravy."

Freda saw at once the advantage she had given the wilful boy. "Oh, I forgot!" she replied, with something like terror.

"It's all right," he continued; "batter pudding is just the thing, for gravy I mean to have. Now, how many pies and other messes?"

"If you please, Arthur, I shall make two large custards. Then there will be raspberry and currant pies, black currant pies, a strawberry pie——"

"Oh no! not that. Better eat the strawberries with cream. I vote strawberry pie flat. We may just as well say a cabbage pie, a carrot pie, a turnip pie——"

"Arthur, how can you!" exclaimed Freda and Iole in a breath.

"Very well; as we are not to have turnip pie, etc., etc., we will just have it thus:—

'Lots of raspberry and currant pies, custards, and strawberries and cream, and no other messes.'

And these things Arthur added to his bill of fare. Just as the writing was done the bell rang for supper, and an hour afterwards all the children were in bed.

The next morning this "Bill of Fare" was produced at the breakfast-table, and caused great laughter—the questioning "hem!" especially. But Mrs. Hexham knew that all the children were very much in earnest, the elder ones especially, and that, under all his pretence of teasing, Arthur was desirous of helping Freda, and was as full of the dinner as the rest. So after breakfast she went into Mrs. Forbes's room and talked over the matter. The dinner, the house-keeper thought, was a really feasible thing. Miss Freda, the cook assured her, made pastry very nicely, and she had on several occasions been into the kitchen to see the full

processes connected with the cooking of fish, meat, vegetables, and sweet puddings.

"But the children left to themselves may overturn the saucepans, or set themselves on fire," said Mrs. Hexham anxiously.

"There *is* certainly some risk, ma'am, but less because Miss Freda is so steady. I think if Pat prepares the brick oven in the scullery just as he does the oven here twice a week when we bake bread, the risk of their clothes catching fire will be much less. The meat might be baked, or, what would be better, roasted here."

"I have said so," replied Mrs. Hexham; "but they will not listen. Their whole idea is, as much as possible, to provide the dinner and cook it themselves. And this brings them to a point of difference and difficulty. The boys want to kill a kid, and also some poultry, but the girls will not listen. They cannot, they say, suffer their pretty pets to be killed, nor even, if killed and dressed, could they eat them."

"Well, ma'am," replied Forbes, with true housekeeper's zeal, "those who have to provide for a family cannot be so nice. There were a pair of island fowls at table yesterday, and we are going to have a pair of ducks on Sunday. The poultry so thrive on that beautiful spot as for it to be necessary, as Denis says, to reduce their number. Indeed, though the young ladies do not know of it, several pairs of ducks and chickens are already penned up to be fed for the purpose of killing."

"Then say nothing to the girls, but settle the matter with Denis and the boys. Give the former full instructions as to the rest of the dinner and its management, and that I think will suffice."

During the morning Freda, Iole and Lucy were called into the housekeeper's room, and there Mrs. Forbes made them write down the necessary list of pies, custards, and

creams, their several ingredients, and how they were to be made and cooked. She also made them commit to writing the whole management of the dinner. She also advised that the fruit tarts should be made that very evening, and that soon after dinner they ought to set off to the isle for that purpose. Pat or Denis should accompany them, and, riding old Jack, carry flour, sugar, and other necessary things.

The girls, including Alice and Judith Desmond, were delighted, and, as proposed, set off shortly after dinner to the isle, where the boys had gone some time before. On arriving there, they could see nothing of them; so, there being no time to lose, they tucked up their frocks and put on their aprons and caps, and set to work at once. They went into their charming garden and gathered the currants, raspberries and ripe gooseberries, and, returning to the kitchen, picked them nicely, and filled sundry large tart dishes Tarra had made for them. This done, Freda put the necessary flour into a clean earthen pan, added a little salt, and fetching a large lump of butter, rubbed it patiently and carefully in. Then she mixed up the paste with as little water as possible, and rolling it out several times, added each time a layer of butter. The other girls helped her to cover the dishes; and in due time a long row of nice-looking pies stood on the dresser. Pat meanwhile had heated the oven with dry faggots; and now, sweeping out the ashes, the pies—to say nothing of sundry little cakes—went in.

All the afternoon the girls had been listening with something like dread for the “quack, quack,” of the unfortunate ducks, and more than once they felt sure that this dismal noise met their ear. As probably it had—for while the pie-baking was progressing, the outer kitchen door was opened, and Arthur, Walter and Harold came in; the former bearing the dead kid in a cloth, Walter a pair of fine ducks on a cabbage-leaf, and Harold a pair of fowls on a ditto ditto.

"Here, Freda," called out Arthur in his quick way ; "here's something for gravy. This is why we have been away and busy all the afternoon. It wasn't tolerable that the great batter pudding should be without gravy."

"Oh, Arthur, what *have* you done?" exclaimed all the girls at once, "what *have* you done? Our poor pets! our poor dears!" And some of them began to cry tears of real pain. "Oh, we shall never eat a bit."

"Yes, you will," coaxed Walter,— "you will, Freda ; you always see reason. You must and will forget all about poor 'quack, quack' when you smell and taste nice brown gravy. Don't cry any more ; I don't like to see you cry."

"Don't mind her," said Arthur ; "she'll be all right presently. Girls are so miserably sentimental. Let us get to business. The truth is, we've too much kid here. The fellow turns out larger than we thought for : half will be enough. What can we do with the rest?"

Freda looked up. "Send it home," she said with fluttering breath ; "or perhaps, coming from the island, the Ladies Clare would accept it."

"We boys thought so. Mike says the housekeeper would be glad of a fore-quarter, for kid is delicate eating, and the castle is full of company. So let us send it at once ; Mike will take it. It will, I think, be in time for to-day's dinner, and let us write a paper and stick it on with a skewer."

Freda's heart was very troubled, yet she liked the idea of expressing their gratitude thus to the Ladies Clare ; so one of the younger girls fetching pen, ink and paper, she wrote, at Arthur's dictation, as follows :—

"SOMETHING FOR DINNER.

"From the Grateful Children at Island Morr to the Ladies Clare."

Then followed six signatures—beginning with that of

Arthur, and ending with Lucy's. Dear little Kathie put her initials, "K. Q.," for Freda had just begun to teach her writing, and Arthur guided her hand. She was delighted.

Old Mike was called in, and he with his knife divided the dead animal. The label was attached, some fern was fetched, and in this the meat was placed ; and in five minutes more old Mike was on his way to the castle.

"Now, Freda," said Arthur a little grimly ; "instead of crying, just look at these ducks and their giblets. Did you ever see anything so fine ? And the fowls : look at their breasts. Old Mike, according to his usual phrase, says 'there isn't their likes in ould Ireland.'"

"I cannot talk about these poor things," sighed Freda. "And then, Arthur, how *are* we to roast them all ? True, the kid may go into the oven——"

"Kid !" exclaimed Arthur rather rudely ; "who thinks of trusting you girls with the kid ? The ducks and fowls are enough for you to spoil. Kid ! Mike and I are going to cook it, and something else too, if we are lucky. Mike knows how to make an oven that will cook anything ; so leave all this to me."

"Arthur," cried Walter, "you make too sure of your own performances ; and if you go on domineering over Freda in this way, why——"

Freda saw that a quarrel was imminent, so she broke in upon its commencement by saying,—

"Please say no more, Arthur. Take which part of the cooking you please, and leave us undisturbed to do ours. Iole and I are not so ignorant as you think. Please go. It is now just seven, and at half-past eight we will be ready for a game of blind-man's-buff before we return home."

That nothing further might be said, she left the kitchen to fetch the cooking-book Miss Haller had given her, and when she returned the boys were gone.

According to some memoranda she had written down, she found that the giblets ought to be stewed before making them into a pie ; so she placed them in a dish with some whole pepper, a little salt, a blade of mace, an eschalot, a piece of lemon-peel, and a small quantity of water. By this time all the fruit tarts were done. Taking these from the oven, the giblets were put in to slowly stew, the temperature being by this time comparatively low ; and thus they stewed till nicely tender. The little maids then put the tarts in the larder, did what else was necessary, and neatly cleared away. Then they took off their aprons and caps, and, summoning the boys, had a glorious game of blind-man's-buff, which lasted till their ponies were saddled and it was time to start for home.

The elder children did not sleep much that night. The boys were full of their own schemes, and were off to the isle before breakfast, and the girls were no sluggards. Yet, early as it was, Freda, Iole and Lucy found Mrs. Forbes in her room making up divers nice parcels for them, one of which contained a long tablecloth. Dinner was to be set out in the lower gallery, as being the room nearest completion ; and for a temporary table Mike and Pat were to lay some of the planks used in building the house upon four tressels which had served the same purpose.

Hearing that the first part of the dinner was to consist of fried trout or boiled salmon, roast kid and roast ducks and fowls, Mrs. Forbes had already written down full instructions.

"If Pat heats the oven nicely, sweeps it out well, and leaves it not too hot, the kid and ducks will bake admirably if put in separate dishes of appropriate size. The kitchen fire will thus be free for the fowls, for the frying-pan for the trout, and the saucepans for the vegetables."

"But, Mrs. Forbes," said Freda, "I thought you knew,—

Arthur and Walter are going to cook the kid themselves. Arthur says that unless they do some part of the cooking, there will sure to be nothing to eat, for he is positive that we shall spoil everything."

"More likely *he* will spoil everything," replied Forbes indignantly. "What an audacious boy! It is really time his self-will should be punished. Don't mind him, Miss Freda; follow the instructions I have written down, and you will certainly succeed. One thing be sure you do: keep the boys out of the kitchen. Pat, who has only just come from the isle, and is now in our kitchen taking his breakfast, will be your right hand, I'm sure; for he is one of the handiest boys I ever knew. And don't be surprised if you have visitors to tea, for we all think of taking holiday and going to the isle, as we shall all be anxious to know how the great event of the dinner has passed off."

In a few minutes more, Mr. and Mrs. Desmond and their children arrived from Islandmore. In order not to detain the little company, Forbes made breakfast for them. They then mounted their ponies and rode away—their sweet faces beaming with happiness and the anticipation of a day of perfect joy.

"What a pity such a day cannot last for ever!" thought Mrs. Hexham as she waved her hand in farewell.

Even the brisk little Irish ponies seemed to know that something unusual was astir, for they were uncommonly frisky and full of pace. A mere shake of their bridles was hint enough that they must put their best foot forward, and in the least possible time they had rounded the headland, climbed the thymy upland, and descended to the lovely shore of the lake, over which the lights and shadows of early morning lay in supreme beauty. Here the good and pretty pets were unsaddled, and set free to graze and wander as they willed.

Pat had been at work from a very early hour. He had lighted the oven, milked the goats, dug up enough potatoes, gathered and shelled the peas, and he and Phineas had placed the planks and tressels ready to serve as a dinner-table in that part of the gallery already covered with tiles ; and now the latter was away fishing for a dish of trout in the second lake. He had of late been making some very pretty plates and dishes of various colours, and, bringing them to the isle that morning, had set them ready for the little maids' use. These were to be variously filled with strawberries, gooseberries, currants, raspberries, almonds and raisins, figs, biscuits and cakes, chocolate-creams, and other sweet things that children love.

The girls were soon in their caps and aprons ; and then Freda, adding to the giblets some beef Forbes had sent, made the pie and set it to bake. Then she put the milk for the custards to simmer with nice lemon-peel and cinnamon. Next she set some dough to rise for rolls ; and after this, when the batter for the pudding was made, she looked at her cooking-book and memoranda, and fetched the ducks and fowls from the larder. Then she saw that Arthur or the other boys had already been there, for the half of the kid reserved for dinner had been removed.

"I'm thinking, Miss Freda," replied Pat when appealed to, "that the young gintlemin was fearing we'd begin wid its cookin' the first thing. Better I'm shure they'd lift it, for me ould grandfather's tales are very purty to tell, but not always wid reason in 'im. I'm thinkin' they'll be smokin' or burnin' the nice mate, for they're all off after a big salmon we're to have for dinner."

"Salmon !" exclaimed Freda, with a true cook's fears, "you really don't mean it ! Salmon ! how is it to be cooked ?"

"Oh, they've borrowed one of me grandmother's kittles, and a roaring wood fire is already burning. But the fish has

yet to be caught,"—and so saying, Pat smiled. Then he added, "Phin's a 'cute boy : he sid this mornin', ' Miss Freda shall not want for the fish,' and this is why he's off to the second lake."

Wiping out the insides of the ducks and fowls with a nice cloth, and singeing off any down or feather-stumps with a piece of white paper, Freda mixed together four table-spoonfuls of fine breadcrumbs, four small onions chopped fine, some small lumps of butter, a little salt, and plenty of pepper. With these ingredients she stuffed the ducks, then trussed and floured them a little. Inside the fowls she put a little mixture of crumbs of bread, pepper, salt, and butter. Then she trussed them nicely, the head under one wing, the liver under another.

By twelve o'clock all was in progress. The rolls, and gibletpie, and custards were baked, the boiled custard set to cool, the strawberry cream ready, the ducks in the oven, the fowls twirling at the fire. Then Phin came in with a fine dish of trout already scaled and cleaned, and the frying-pan was put on with some fat to get hot. The potatoes were doing, as also the peas. Then while the younger girls took care of the cooking for a few minutes, Freda and Judith, helped by Pat, laid the cloth. In the centre of the table were placed various dishes and bowls filled with the prettiest flowers, mosses, and ferns ; and round these they arranged a few plates filled with fruits. Each end of the long table was also adorned with flowers, and then the spoons, knives and forks, and other things, were set out.

They then returned to the kitchen, where Pat fried the trout, and Freda, consulting her memoranda, made the melted butter,—and very nice it was. By this time the ducks were done and smelt deliciously, and the fowls were brown and just ready, so also were the peas and potatoes. It wanted five minutes to one o'clock, and the dinner was ready to dish.

Nothing, as yet, had been heard of Arthur, Walter, and Harold, or of their companions Sydney and William. So Pat was despatched in search of them. Five minutes had not elapsed before he returned in a great hurry.

"Oh, Miss Freda ! oh, Miss I'le ! There's such a smoke and such a smell of burning, and Masther Arthur's callin' out as though th' divil had got hold of 'im. You'd better come. I ain't bin' to 'im, but I can hear 'im, and I can hear me grandfather. They're all a good bit from here, at the fishin' place by the trees."

Freda's whole thoughts were of Arthur. Something must have happened. "Girls," she called, "keep the dinner hot, and I'll soon be back again." Losing not another moment, but running as fleetly as she could the whole length of the isle, she soon came to the fishing-place beneath the trees, and a glance showed what had happened. The boys helped by Mike had built the oven, heated it, put in the half-kid to bake, and then gone some little distance off to catch the great salmon, which with others the latter had put into the lake some days before. First they tried to take it with a rod and line ; failing to do so, old Mike threw in a small net. This catching upon various jagged roots of trees, the old fisherman, to disentangle it, had to wade up to his waist in water. Approaching it, the net was seen to contain a very splendid salmon ; but the creature was so heavy, and so lashed its tail, and darted to and fro, that it was with difficulty it could be drawn to land. During this scene of naturally great excitement to boys, the kid and its cookery had been wholly forgotten. But now, smelling an overpowering stench of burnt flesh, the recollection of their neglected duties as cooks rushed at once to their minds.

"Oh dear!" called Arthur : "that's the kid, I'm sure." He rushed off, followed by the others ; and there, sure enough, a dense smoke was issuing from the oven. Forgetful of

everything, in his dread of disaster, he pulled down the bricks which served as a door, and thrust in his hand to bring out the dish that held the meat. Part was on fire, part was burnt to a cinder ; and the fat from the dish, running over his right hand, scalded it severely. Agonized with pain, yet even more distressed that this terrible disaster should have happened to the chief part of their dinner—and this after he had so taunted the girls as to their ignorance of cooking—Arthur, who was no stoic, might well run about and cry out. To make matters worse, the fire over which the salmon was to have been boiled had died out, and when old Mike, drenched and covered with mud, came hurrying out with “the gratest salmon in ould Ireland” stretched across his arm, he stood speechless.

Freda now appeared. She had no eye for the humiliating disasters which had occurred—only an ear for Arthur’s cry of pain.

“Dear Arthur !—what’s the matter?”

“Oh ! only that we’ve horridly messed the kid, and the salmon isn’t boiled, and——”

In his shame and humiliation he forgot his great pain.

“But you’ve scalded your hand, dear ; that’s the worst ! Never mind the dinner ; we shall have plenty, and it’s all ready to serve. We’ve done our cooking capitally. Now your poor hand ! let me see it. Pat, get the wooden piggin in which you put the bait, fill it with water, and Arthur can hold his hand in it while we walk beside him to the house. There we’ll wrap a wet rag round it. This is mamma’s remedy, you know ; remember how she cured yours and Walter’s burns when you spilt hot lead in making bullets. Come on, dear ; the dinner is quite ready.”

She put Arthur’s hand into the little bait piggin, and led him to the house.

“But I am such a figure, Freda,”

Freda for the first time observed him, and also the other boys ; and they were all indeed in a sorry plight. Their shoes and clothes were wet and muddied, and Arthur and Walter's faces were begrimed with smoke from the oven.

"Oh, just wash your hands till after dinner ; that will do. We girls cannot put on our clean frocks till then. Dinner is quite ready. It must not be kept waiting any longer, or it will spoil !"

Freda led Arthur into the gallery, and, wetting a soft cloth, pinned it tenderly round his hand. Then making him take his place at the table, she hurried off to dish the dinner. By the time she reached the kitchen, Pat and his grandfather had recounted the morning's disasters, and all were much concerned. But there was now no time for talking. The poultry and trout with the vegetables were dished, and, with the great batter pudding, carried upstairs and set on the table—Pat and Phineas being the waiters—and very handy they were. In the interval since catching the fine dish of trout, the latter had been home and put on his Sunday clothes ; and at the children's request had invited his mother, father, brothers and sisters, to take tea on the island at six o'clock. Mike had also orders to fetch his old dame.

"And shure, Miss Freda," he said, "won't she be plased to taste th' nice tay and th' swate cakes, and listen to yer purty tongues ? And won't me polish me shoes and put on me dacent coat,—for shure, didn't I 'buy one out of me last pig ? and me Mary's given me two new shirts and a ra'al black silk neckercher." It was thus evident that Mike meant to be smart.

Presently all the dishes were on the table ; and the boys having washed their hands, and the girls taken off their aprons, they all sat down. The dinner looked grand, for at the bottom of the table was a large piece of cold boiled beef,

and midway on one side was a ham, and on the other a tongue ; for Forbes, anticipating innumerable disasters, had taken care that the children should not be without food. Some of them partook of the trout, and all of the great batter pudding, which with the fine duck gravy was incomparable. As he looked down the table and saw the dinner so well cooked and served, Arthur felt very much ashamed of himself, as it was right he should be ; for his habit of teasing the girls, and his high opinion of his own performances, needed check. Yet all the girls were very sorry both for his disaster and his burnt hand, for they loved the wilful boy very tenderly.

The carving the poultry was somewhat a perplexity, for Arthur, owing to his burnt hand, could not officiate. Walter began to cut the ducks quite wrongly ; Harold said there was another way. Sydney and William suggested other modes ; and Freda was puzzled as to the tongue, so Pat was despatched for the cooking book. After consulting the cuts therein, the carvers got on very much better ; and presently all were served. Pat and Phineas sat in the porch and held their plates on their knees ; and old Mike took his place a little way outside, "where," as he said, "he could pick the poultry bones with ra'al comfort and aise."

The second course consisted of the tarts, custards, and strawberry-cream, and to these all the children did ample justice. One by one the great tarts disappeared, and yet their appetites seemed as brisk as ever. It was only when they came to the last dish that they felt they had had enough. Then, as though for good manners' sake, they despatched the remnants to old Mike, who said "Miss Freda's pasthry was a grate thrate to him."

While they were thus dining, no one observed that Mrs. Hexham had been standing all the time at one of the windows sketching them ; but now, on rising, they at once

saw her much-loved face. They all hurried out, and would have fain led her in, but she said she had already lunched, and wished to finish her sketch. Thus she went on with her work while a cloth was laid under the shade of some trees and dessert set forth, and while girls and boys alike returned indoors to make themselves fit for company.

The boys soon came back with their hands and faces washed, their hair combed, and their shoes and clothes brushed. Somewhat later the girls appeared in fresh crisp muslin frocks, pretty ribbons, and neatly dressed hair. Then, sitting down on the grass, and about the dessert, their fun began. Their only drinkables were lemonade and water ; but in these they pledged each other's health. Then Arthur, though his hand still pained him, made a funny speech, at which they all laughed heartily. He praised the dinner, and complimented Freda on her cookery : that young lady was very pleased, though inclined to think the praise ironical. Then they helped each other to strawberries and gooseberries, and cakes and sweets of many kinds.

Sidney and William Desmond had brought an accordion, on which both could play very nicely. To this they soon began to sing, and were thus employed when the magpie, who had been absent for quite two days, as it was supposed at the castle, came flying thence, and, settling on the topmost boughs of a bush close by, eyed the children furtively. After this survey, he flew amid the dessert dishes, and hopped towards Arthur.

"Why, he's got something both in his beak and his claw !" cried several of the children. "Look at him, Arthur !"

Arthur stretched out his left hand, but the bird hopped away. Presently it returned, and suffered Arthur to take what it held. All the children crowded round, for their curiosity was intense. On inspection, the things were found to be two old-fashioned rings ; one being a wide hoop of

gold-and-black enamel, on the inner side of which was engraved, "Mary Clare : in memory of her dear mother." The other ring was set with rubies and emeralds, and seemed of great value.

"Trick has stolen these," said several of the children with much concern. "What can we do? If the old ladies miss them, some servant may be suspected."

"We'll ask mamma," spoke Freda; "she will know best what to do. They must come from the castle, and the wonder is Trick has brought them so safely across the lake."

Mrs. Hexham, having finished her sketch of the children while at dinner, was repeating the process while they sat at dessert; thus she was not far off. She paused to look at the rings; but did not appear to be so much surprised as the children expected.

"Indeed, I rather anticipated something of this sort. For Trick, like Lufra and Bob, has become a great favourite, and so is allowed to hop about the rooms. The only fear is, the servants will wring his neck when they find him playing pranks that might bring them into serious trouble."

"What can be done, mamma?" asked Freda. "We shouldn't like Trick to be killed, or any servant suspected of stealing."

"He has become such a favourite," replied Mrs. Hexham quietly, "that he will not easily be dethroned. I will put the rings in my pocket-book, and, as soon as I see Miss Haller, I will give them to her to hand to one of the maids, with a request to keep her ladies' jewellery in a drawer while the bird is suffered to rove from room to room."

This matter settled, Mrs. Hexham resumed her work, and the children, returning to their places, soon began to dance to some pretty waltz tunes Sidney played.

They were all in the midst of this high fun, when, the

accordion ceasing for a moment in order to change its tune, they all distinctly heard the measured sweep of oars upon the lake. Looking round, they saw a long row-boat coming from the direction of some steps on the castle lawn, towards a spit of land not far away from the island-house. It was full of well-dressed people ; and two men, whom Arthur and Walter knew to be gardeners, were rowing.

"We must be like mice," said the former in a merry whisper, "for I suppose these are the castle visitors,—the Duke of A, the Marquis of B, the Earl of C, the Baron D, and the Ladies E, F, G, H, and so on. I suppose they all wear their coronets."

Nevertheless the children feared that they had all made too much noise ; so they returned to where the dessert was set forth, and, hurriedly sitting down, pretended to be busy helping each other.

Presently they were spoken to. Looking up, they saw Dr. Marlow and Miss Haller, and, close beside them, about seven plainly dressed ladies and gentlemen, one or two of the former being very pretty and young. To the children's delight, Lufy was there too ; but that pretty creature, true to her unbounded love for her mistress, was off as soon as she saw her.

"I have brought these ladies and gentlemen to see the house, of which they have been hearing a good deal," spoke the Doctor to Arthur. "As architect, you must show it to us. But what is the matter with your hand?"

"I've scalded it," replied Arthur laconically.

"How did you do it?" asked Miss Haller with concern. "Has there been any catastrophe with the dinner?"

Arthur was mute.

"If you please, Miss Haller," said Freda in her pretty way, "the boys and old Mike were busy catching a salmon, and so forgot the piece of kid which was cooking in an oven

close by. It caught fire, and poor Arthur, trying to save it, had his hand scalded with the hot fat."

"Then none of you have had any dinner?"

"The best in the world," replied Arthur, with prompt bravery. "The girls are capital cooks; and my scalded hand is only just punishment for laughing as I did at them, and for supposing, in my self-sufficiency, that no one else could cook the kid."

"That's right, my lad," said a somewhat elderly gentleman; "the confession of our errors is as manly as it is wise. In spite of spoilt kid and uncooked salmon, you will be a brave man yet."

The Doctor looked at the boy's hand, and seeing it yet greatly pained him, bid him keep still, and added, that as soon as he returned to the castle he would send over some liniment which would at once relieve it. He then requested the other children to show the house to the lords and ladies.

So they did; and a charming group they were,—little Irish Kathie taking the Duke's proffered hand with an easy innocence that won his heart.

As Freda rightly thought, it was well Arthur was not there; for the gentlemen, one and all, expressed the utmost astonishment at the design of the house, and the skill with which it had been erected with materials so common and rude. "The lad," they said, "must be a genius."

"And so he is," replied the Doctor; "and what is more, he has marvellous self-assertion and indomitable will. At present these characteristics are vices rather than virtues; but if happily they become subdued by experience and suffering, the boy Arthur Betton will most likely be a true and earnest man."

The visitors examined everything; and were much struck with the original and good taste displayed everywhere.

"It is all due to Mrs. Hexham," Miss Haller said; "her

good taste and fine feeling are striking characteristics. To this I may add her marvellous industry. Being industrious herself, the children unconsciously follow her example, and the result is, as you see, an extraordinary amount of effective work. Neither I nor Dr. Marlow have often to complain of neglected lessons ; and yet the children always seem to be painting, or busy with their house or museum. Not a moment seems lost."

While the visitors examined the tilework in the lower gallery, Freda was surprised to see that all the dinner-things had been cleared away, and the boards and tressels removed ; and when they reached the kitchen, she was more surprised still to see that Mary and Dina had already come, and with their holiday gowns tucked up beneath large aprons, were busy clearing away, and also preparing for tea on a large and hospitable scale. In these labours they were assisted by Pat and Phineas. As the latter had been inquired for, two of the gentlemen now spoke to him, and requesting information as to some of his work, bid him return with them to the various rooms. Though much abashed, he replied to their questions very readily, and soon explained the processes by which the tiles the children had painted were wrought, as also the tiles formed of various coloured clays. The Duke praised his ingenuity and industry, and, giving him a sovereign, told him to continue his good work, and he would be an honour to Ireland.

In the dairy the ladies tasted the cream and admired the pretty red glazed milk-pans ; and in the garden the company partook of some strawberries, and pronounced their flavour fine. Then they looked at the flower garden and miniature fields ; and thence made a circuit of the isle ; admiring at every point the transcendent scenery, combined of lake, shore, woodland, and hills. Arrived at the spot where the boat waited, the lords and ladies wished the happy children

"good-bye," and the Duke, lifting up sweet little Irish Kathie, kissed her tenderly, and said he would send her the finest doll he could buy. This promise greatly delighted her.

The boat was rowed away. The children watched it anxiously out of sight, for they were glad to feel free once more. On nearing the house they found Arthur asleep, so for the present they did not make much noise, but running off to the kitchen, helped Dina, Mary and Pat with the tea. The tressels and boards were now laid out on a shady plot of grass some distance from the house, and here tea was set forth. Just as this business was accomplished the company began to arrive : Mr. and Mrs. Tarra and their children ; old Mike and his wife ; Dina's sweetheart, who was a handsome coastguardsman ; Mr. and Mrs. Desmond ; Forbes, Denis, and Terence Foyle ; and Mrs. Hexham, leaving off work, was one of the company. The elder girls, assisted by Mary and Dina, made tea ; and the boys handed round all the good eatables. "The tay" Mr. and Mrs. Mike pronounced to be "the finest in ould Ireland" ; which was certainly high praise.

Before tea was over, the liniment was brought for Arthur's hand ; and this upon application mitigating the pain, he was soon ready for as high fun as the rest. The tea-things were cleared away, the accordion was played, and dancing begun ; the old looking on while the young performed. After dancing came blind man's buff and other games ; till twilight, followed by the rising of the moon, showed that even our days of joy must have an end.

In less than an hour the "lawny isle" was left to the great peace of nature ; and later still, when Freda lay down to rest, she knew that she should bear in memory that island-day as the happiest she could ever know. Its joy had been only marred by Arthur's mortification and pain ; and though probably he would be the wiser and better for the lesson taught, she sighed, for she loved him very tenderly.

CHAPTER IX.

MY LORD'S CHAMBER.

AFTER this happy island-day, Mr. and Mrs. Desmond soon concluded their visit, and with them also departed Terence Foyle. All had enjoyed the generous hospitality bestowed, and all expressed their intense admiration of the scenery at Morr ; its fine lakes, its wonderful sea-shore, its depth of woodland, and its silent lonely hills. Mr. Desmond, who had traversed Ireland in every direction, declared that, for variety and great natural beauty, he knew nothing to compare with this wild and little known district. He added that, apart from their intense enjoyment of such an unexpected holiday, his children would receive the greatest benefit from even so temporary a companionship with the children under Mrs. Hexham's care. Their ceaseless and varied industry, and the joys and blessings which followed, would, he felt sure, be influential with his own children in effecting much practical good. Prior to leaving Morr, he and Mrs. Desmond invited Mrs. Hexham and the children to spend the month of September at their country house near Limerick ; and the former told Terence Foyle, if ever he needed a move in life, to go to him, and he would strive to be his friend. For the sake of Freda and the rest, Mrs. Hexham accepted his generous invitation, provided she could finish her long task of modelling by the end of August. If not, the visit must be put off to another year. But she added she would

strive hard to accomplish her work by the necessary time, as she felt she needed a little rest and change, and she also wished to see and secure the services of the clever mason of whom Mr. Desmond spoke so highly. Thus hoping for this visit, Mr. and Mrs. Desmond and their children took their departure.

The daily life of the Grange soon fell into its accustomed channel. Mrs. Hexham went every week-day to the castle and worked long hours ; Dr. Marlow attended three times a week in the schoolroom in the old tower, and the children were very good and diligent ; and Miss Haller, paying an afternoon or else evening visit to the Grange as often as she could, gave her customary lessons in German, French, and music.

Yet the children had many leisure hours, and they employed them well. For the boys there were carpentering, gardening, and the sowing with grain the two small enclosures they called fields. The girls had to sew many things necessary in housekeeping, and boys and girls alike went on with tile-painting under Mrs. Hexham's care. Occasionally they took a ride far away into the woods, or over the lonely hills, or else went a long ramble on either shore, searching as they went along for shells, stones, seaweeds and plants, or going into pits and caves, they looked about for fossils. In this way they found many curious and beautiful things, so that their museum in the lower gallery of the island-house began to look very nice indeed.

But their greatest pleasure about this date arose from a hunt they made in the large store-room of the tower. They had the express permission of the Ladies Clare to do this, as also from whatever they found to select what they pleased for use in the island-house ; the only proviso being that, prior to removal, the things were to be submitted to Dr. Marlow. But as, on the several occasions on which they asked

him to look, he merely gave a quick glance and then said "Take it, take it," they did pretty much as they pleased. They found a nice old sofa covered with rich silk, which only needed a little cleaning and patching to look very well indeed; and they came upon four old ebony and sandalwood arm-chairs, over the elbows and seats of which the fine canvas-work was still fresh and bright. Several pretty oval mirrors, brackets, and sconces, were brought to light, as also rugs, carpets, and small tables. There were framed pictures and prints by the dozen, most of which were likely to look well when cleaned and furbished up, for the frames displayed the good taste and workmanship of the latter half of the eighteenth century. And, to crown their delight, they found in several large boxes, books, prints, old-fashioned dresses, remnants of linen and silk, small porcelain and earthenware figures, and knickknacks of various kinds.

The children were in the midst of this great pleasure, when one evening, on returning from the castle, Mrs. Hexham quietly told them that her modelling work was done; and that, such being the case, she should write and accept Mr. and Mrs. Desmond's invitation to Limerick. On hearing this, their joy was boundless, for Sydney and William Desmond had promised Arthur, Walter and Harold much pleasure in boating, cricketing, chess, and other games; and Freda, Iole and Lucy were to pay an innumerable round of visits with Judith and Alice. The children at Morr wrote to the children at Limerick that same evening, and a few posts after came notes promising hearty welcome.

On the following morning Miss Haller paid a visit to the Grange, and sat for some time alone with Mrs. Hexham in her studio. She brought a note with her; and that note seemed to give the latter the greatest pleasure, for the children saw her read it again and again, and more than once, while reading, the tears stood in her eyes. The younger children

innocently asked why she cried, and she simply replied, "Because she was very happy. Her work had given great pleasure to those for whom she had effected it, and in consequence her mind was relieved of a great weight and responsibility."

A few days afterwards two large boxes which had come from London were delivered at the Grange, and upon being opened, they were found to contain choice clothing of divers kinds : nice dresses and jackets, and cuffs, collars, handkerchiefs and gloves for Mrs. Hexham and the girls, and suitable garments for the boys. These acceptable presents were made by the Ladies Clare. Of course in several instances the garments did not fit, so that the services of a tailor from Islandmore, and of one of the ladies'-maids from the castle, had to be brought into requisition ; but the work of a few days served to perfect them. Thus all necessary preparations were soon finished, and on one bright morning in early September, the fourgon stood ready at the porch to convey Mrs. Hexham and the children to the distant town. Thence they took the railway to Limerick, which reaching on the following day, they all received, as was to be expected, a hearty Irish welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Desmond and their children.

As arranged, the visit lasted a month. Mr. Desmond's house was located some miles from Limerick, amid most charming scenery. When this had been explored, excursions were made into several neighbouring counties. The coast was visited at several points, as also the lakes of Killarney, while at home and abroad were parties and dances ; so that almost every day brought some new and great enjoyment, and the children were supremely happy.

Mrs. Hexham's chief purpose for visiting Limerick was that of engaging the services of Felix Devellin, the clever mason of whose ability Mr. Desmond had spoken so highly.

Both the man and his work proved that this praise was well merited ; and Mrs. Hexham, by the desire of those who employed her, offered him high pay and certain work for a year or more if he would go to Castle Morr and generally assist her in transferring to marble the model she had so laboriously completed. To this proposal Devellin gladly consented, provided his master would again employ him should he return to Limerick at the close of his engagement. Whereupon the master-mason was appealed to ; and he—after some little hesitation—agreed to spare his man, generously adding that a good workman ought not to lose through the selfishness of a master an opportunity of improving his fortune ; and should Devellin return, he would very gladly take him back. This matter settled, it was arranged, that the young mason should follow Mrs. Hexham to Morr some time in the first week in October.

During the last days of this happy visit, Mr. Desmond presented the girls with a charming suite of linen for their island-house. It consisted of sheets, pillow-slips, tablecloths, towels, dusters, and various kinds of cloths for kitchen use. The better tablecloths were perfect works of art, as he himself had made the designs for their bordering, and then had them woven in permanent colours of dark blue and Pompeian red. Mr. Desmond believed, as many true artists believe, that a great advance will be made in the decoration of our tables when varying degrees of permanent colours are introduced as bordering for tablecloths and napkins. His exquisite taste had suggested simplicity and appropriateness in the patterns he might design for the children's use ; and he carried out his idea. On two large tablecloths, for use in the lower gallery, were diapered borders in blue and red ; and for other rooms were pretty patterns expressive of heraldic devices, bird-life and animal-life, as also variations of flowers and climbing plants. The

table-napkins matched. The girls and Mrs. Hexham were highly pleased with these beautiful gifts. Mr. Desmond added to them many choice articles in pottery, and with the boys he searched various shops for old ornamental ironwork and locks—such being much wanted for the island-house. But these happy days had to end at last. Amid mutual and real regrets the children parted, hoping to see each other again the following year, and necessarily unconscious that—at least for some of them—the affection felt and reciprocated was destined to have permanence in years to come. They all returned to Morr, and the old happy days began again.

At the time arranged, the mason reached Castle Morr, and board and lodging were provided for him. After an interval of about a fortnight, Mrs. Hexham renewed her sedulous work ; never, as heretofore, omitting a single day ; but leaving the Grange about half-past nine o'clock a.m., and reaching the castle about ten, she worked on till dusk fell. All she told the children was to the effect that a suite of charming rooms on the level of the castle terrace had been assigned to her, and that in one of these she and Devellin worked together ; the mason preceding her in chipping and shaping the splendid block of Carrara marble.

But though her labours were thus no longer intermittent, there were days when neither Dr. Marlow nor Miss Haller kept their appointments ; although they rarely omitted sending a message to the effect that they were otherwise engaged. As usual on such occasions, the elder children—if their lessons were ready and weather permitted—rode off to the island to work at house, garden, or fields, or else to paint the tiles Tarra and Phineas had made ready for them.

Just as the school had been removed from the tower to the Grange for the winter months, one of these absences occurred ; and the elder children, taking advantage of so much leisure, went off daily to the island. Sometimes it was

Arthur, Freda and Iole, sometimes Walter and Arthur ; rarely more than three were absent at a time. The younger children needed company, and the season being late and the days short, it was not fitting they should go so far.

Thus, one gusty morning in November, Arthur and his two sisters started off to the island-house. There was plenty of work of various kinds for the girls to do ; and after dinner—warming some up they had brought with them—they went and sat in the “heraldic room,” and there, so long as they could, they went on painting tiles, on which Arthur and Walter had traced the outlines. The former was busy in the “bird room” fitting up some shelves in a recess between two windows, and working diligently all the morning, was still busy as the afternoon wore away.

The sun beginning to decline, shed its rays of reddened light upon the lake, when Arthur, looking up, saw Dr. Marlow come out upon the castle terrace accompanied by five or six dogs, among which was Nero. This was a certain sign that he was going for a long walk ; and it was probable he needed it, as for nearly a week he had omitted his attendance at the schoolroom, and by this the children well knew that he was keeping his accustomed vigil. At such a distance across the lake it was impossible without a glass to distinguish features ; but he was probably weary from anxiety and long want of rest, for he rubbed his hands together, stretched out his arms, and stamped his feet ; then buttoning his coat and settling his wide-awake, he whistled the dogs, and set off swiftly towards the hills, as though bent on vigorous exercise. Arthur wondered, for he had never previously seen the Doctor out with all the larger dogs at once.

He had just resumed his work, when the thought flashed across his mind, “Would not this be an excellent opportunity to make out what is really the fact of the castle mystery?”

All the fierce dogs were away ; the shadows of early evening were fast descending ; the chill wind not only came moaning off the sea, but rustling amid the fallen leaves hid all lighter sounds, and made the hush and stillness of the hour intense. The question was no sooner put than it was answered. He would swim across the lake, enter the castle, and, taking the direction in which the mystery was hidden, make his own survey. Action instantly followed thought. He exchanged his working blouse for his jacket, crept noiselessly downstairs, searched for a piece of cord and a towel, and left the house. In the shadow of some trees, near the landing staith opposite the castle, he undressed, placed his clothes, shoes and the towel upon the top of his head, and tied them there securely with the cord ; then, plunging boldly into the lake, struck vigorously out for the opposite shore. The water, flowing from so many mountain springs, felt at first intensely cold. It took away his breath, and he feared he must return. But striking out again, his courage grew ; he swam on, and in ten minutes had reached the opposite shore. Landing, and taking shelter in one of many dense clumps of evergreens which just there bordered the lake, he dried himself and quickly dressed. Then, peeping out of his retreat, and finding all intensely still, he went quickly but cautiously towards the terrace. Proceeding along this in the direction needed, he saw that a lamp had been already lighted in that one of the mysterious rooms which opened on to the balcony. Looking out for the double glass door by which Dr. Marlow had made his exit so recently, he saw it opened into a hall ; though little of it could be seen in the fading light. Turning the handle as gently as he could, the half of the door readily opened, and in another moment he found himself treading a rich carpet that covered the central portions of a marble floor. On the opposite side of this hall wound up a fine staircase ; and this

being lighted on the farthest side with deep-set windows, was probably the same staircase up which, from another direction, the children had watched Mrs. Hexham ascend on the day she first visited the castle.

Not a sound was to be heard, not a light or servant to be seen ; the staircase was veiled in shadows. Ascending and winding round with it, Arthur reached a wide picture-hung gallery, which penetrated apparently on either hand far into the interior of the house. He followed in the direction he considered to be the right one, but his progress was presently barred by wide doors covered with crimson cloth. By slight pressure these opened noiselessly into a still wider extension of the gallery, still more profusely hung with pictures, and lighted some distance beyond by a very large window of richly stained glass, beneath which stood an organ. From this gallery were several doors on either side, and one or more standing partly open, dim rays of lamplight issued forth. Stepping softly to the edge of the first door and looking round, he saw it was a drawing or ladies' room. It was hung, wherever space permitted, with very fine paintings, while many others stood on movable easels. There were cabinets and recesses filled with rich porcelain, Limoges enamels, ivories and bijouterie of a most costly kind. The tables were strewn with books, and decorated with the choicest flowers ; and, by the many signs of feminine occupation, it was probably a room used by the Ladies Clare, though 'at that precise moment unoccupied by any one. Double doors, standing partly open, led into the next room, which was much larger, and undoubtedly a library, as it was lined with well-filled bookshelves. But even here signs of art in sculpture and painting prevailed, for every available place was filled with small yet exquisite specimens of statuary and pictures. The situation of the windows of this, as also of the preceding rooms, proved to Arthur that on reaching

the gallery he had taken the right direction, and that the rooms he had now entered were to a certainty those which had been so long to him and the other children places evoking the intensest curiosity. They were, as could be seen, a long range of apartments opening one into the other ; but the doors in this last—answering to those by which he had entered—were closely shut. Not daring to open them, for he fancied he heard a voice on the other side, he retraced his steps into the gallery, and stepping lightly along, came to a door standing slightly ajar. This he pushed a little open, and peering round, saw at once that it was in all probability the chamber he had so long desired to see. The voice he had heard as though reading on the other side the doors had now ceased, though his quick ear caught the crisp rustle of a newspaper, as some one while reading turned it over.

It was a very large room, and even more than the others a perfect treasury of art. The lamps, here and there, burning evidently with a purposely subdued light, showed that the walls were not only covered with the finest pictures, but that many others stood on handsome easels, which, placed on castors, could be moved about easily and in every direction. Intense as was his mingled excitement, curiosity, and, to some degree, fear, a glance showed Arthur that here were enshrined a large number of Mrs. Hexham's pictures,—not only those she had painted while struggling with great poverty in London, but also those she had accomplished since she came to Morr ; for on a movable easel, just by where he stood, was a fine view of the " Witches' Cauldron," seen from one of its most striking points, and a smaller painting of the dinner scene on the memorable " island-day."

In addition to what was evidently its priceless works of art, the room was luxuriously furnished. A grand piano





"AFTER A MOMENT HE WENT FORWARD AND DISAPPEARED BEHIND THE SCREEN."

stood open, as though recently played upon ; but across the lower end of the room to about half its width, and enclosing probably several windows—that with the balcony among others—was stretched a substantial and lofty screen, movable upon stout low wheels. It was on this side, towards where the boy stood, covered with small oil and water-colour paintings ; and curving round, stood necessarily open at either end. A considerable portion of the room was thus enclosed ; including a fireplace and a large and brightly-burning fire—for the glow of the latter spread itself out beneath the bottom of the screen.

Beyond the movement of the newspaper, the rattle of a falling cinder, and a chattering sort of noise which Arthur well knew betokened the presence of Trick the magpie, not a sound was to be heard. No one entered or left the room, and he had encountered no servant since he had passed in from the terrace ; but this immunity from discovery might not last a single moment. Whatever else he might see in looking round the screen, Arthur felt sure Miss Haller sat behind it. But she might be absorbed in what she was reading, and might not see him. A momentary glance, and that would suffice to make the mystery known to him. He had no cowardice in his nature ; yet, as the supreme moment of discovery approached, a trembling dread overmastered him. Should he steal noiselessly away, and depart as he came ? That would never do ! After a moment's hesitation he went forward, and disappeared behind the end of the screen nearest to him and the farthest from the fire. For a few minutes the silence was unbroken ; then a low and continued cry of a peculiar kind arose. It sounded like the wail of a terrified infant combined with the cry of some small weak animal in pain. Then it was overborne by louder sounds ; and in a moment more, Arthur was pushed round the screen at the point he had entered, and Miss Haller,

holding him tightly by the arm, forced him towards the gallery. She was a tall and powerful woman, and her grasp was that of a giant. She had drowned the feeble cries in her own of anger and surprise, but she spoke no articulate word till she stood face to face with Arthur in the gallery and had closed the door behind her.

"How dare you do this, Arthur?"

The boy made no reply.

She repeated her question again and again, each time more fiercely. Still no answer.

"You *shall* speak," she said. "Be warned. Do not increase my anger, or you will repent."

At length he replied, in an abashed manner, "I wanted to know the mystery."

"Why?"

"For the reason that I never let a mystery or a secret baffle me, nor any purpose on which I have set my mind. Too much has been made of this matter, and I resolved to learn the reality."

"Are you the wiser or better for the knowledge?"

"No! I am very sorry I know it."

The fierce grasp relaxed a little, and the stern voice abated its harshness somewhat.

"You may well be so. I should be overwhelmed with shame to have thus intruded where I was not wanted, and to have pried into the grave realities of a lifelong sorrow. Remembering, too, that the bearer of this heavy load of life and suffering has been not only your benefactor, but of those you love."

"I *am* very sorry," the boy replied, with frank contriteness. "As you truly say, I am ashamed of myself. If I could undo what I have done, I would. But, Miss Haller, I will never speak of what I have seen to living ear."

"For your own sake, for your sisters' sake, for Mrs. Hexham's sake, you will not if you are wise. It is only well

if I can keep this matter from the Ladies Clare. So much do they prize this secret being kept, that, should they even surmise this intrusion, your stay at the Grange would be of the briefest. I must bid my lord keep silence—which, for Mrs. Hexham's sake, I'm sure he will. Now, which way did you come?"

"I swam over the lake from the island, and entered the hall from the terrace."

"You must return the same way, to avoid the dogs. As it is, Nero will be again upon your trail unless prevented, and, to effect this, there is not a moment to lose." As she spoke, Miss Haller opened a door a little way beyond where they stood, and, after listening a moment, made Arthur go before her down a narrow staircase, this ending in a passage opening by a door on to the grounds. "Go," she said peremptorily; "and for your own sake I wish you had never come."

Glad to be released from this trying ordeal, Arthur fled from the terrace to the lake as though pursued; but when he reached the spot, it instantly occurred to him that if he entered the water again the renewed chill might give him cramp, or otherwise so affect him as to stay his power of swimming, and thus he would be drowned. He had felt very cold since his previous swim. All, therefore, he could do was to leave the castle grounds some other way. He recollected that in a little shrub-hidden cove some way beyond where he stood, old Mike occasionally moored a boat. He therefore hurriedly sought the spot, but when he reached it, the boat was there, but nearly full of water; he could therefore only leave the grounds by the seaward end of the lake, and this he knew would be an attempt full of difficulty, as various copious springs issued from the headland on which the castle stood, and from where the cultivated portion of the castle-grounds ceased formed a sort of quag or marsh between the rock and the shore of the lake. The

light, too, was by this time very imperfect. After considering the matter for some moments, he felt it would be better to risk a tumble from the rocks than to flounder through a swamp, half mud, half water, with a chance of being drowned. He therefore hurried back as fast as he could to the seaward end of the castle terrace, and soon leaving the more cultivated portions of the grounds, entered a mingled belt of shrubs and trees, which, as far as possible, had been planted up the rocky acclivities of the castle-steep. Soon vegetation ceased, and then he had nothing before him but bold, bare masses of limestone. Fortunately the twilight increased as he ascended, but the climbing was very difficult, and in some cases impossible. He had therefore to find out some fresh point for trial. Thus by persevering, and after several falls which bruised him considerably, he reached the top. Here the way was easier. Taking for a short distance the direction of the castle, he came to that very long flight of outward steps which, as previously said, were cut in the face of the rock at the point where they faced the tower. Many of them in succession were worn away by force of time and weather, so that here and there he had to make a dangerous slide ; but at last he reached the bottom, though with his hands much cut and bleeding, and his clothes dirtied and torn. He then climbed the wall by the tower, and ran off towards home as fast as he could.

Arthur had left the castle but a few minutes, when Miss Haller, with a warm shawl about her shoulders, and wearing a garden hat, descended the staircase which opened into the hall near the gateway of the Hundred Steps. No porter was there, no servants about ; but some lamps were alight. Passing quickly to a table above which hung a slate, she consulted some writing thereon, and then went swiftly through several doors and passages into a quadrangle surrounded by stables and coach-houses. At the door of one of the latter

she rang a bell, and when a groom appeared, she asked for a heavy dog whip and three collars, one to be that which was spiked and belonging to Nero.

The groom obeyed, but said a little anxiously, as he delivered the articles into her hands, "Shall I go with you, Miss Haller? Is there anything wrong with the dogs?"

"I am only afraid of Master Arthur being again attacked by Nero," she replied concisely; "but be quiet on the subject, and be ready here with Robert when Dr. Marlow returns. Nero must be shut up in his cage for the next few days."

She added no further words, but leaving the quadrangle, went swiftly towards the chief entrance to the castle, and, passing through the lodge gate, took her way along the road which led in the direction of the Grange. This brought her into a hilly lane leading to the woods. Here she sat down on the trunk of a felled tree, and patiently waited. The twilight had by this time increased, and the signs of autumn were around her, in the thick sprinkling of withered and fallen leaves. She had waited about a quarter of an hour, when there came a bay on the wind, then rushing feet, and in another instant the great stately hound stayed beside her. He instantly sniffed at her hands, face, and clothes, and then renewed his bay. Two other dogs in the distance answered at once with their yelping, and soon appeared upon the scene. Without a moment's loss of time, and before the hound was aware of her intent, Miss Haller, with great courage, placed the spiked collar round his throat, fastened it, and seizing the chain attached thereto, held it firmly. Feeling the restraint put upon his movements, the dog tugged at the chain and tried to get free; but Miss Haller striking him heavily with the whip, he at once crouched down.

Feeling sure that he was approaching, she called Dr. Marlow by name, and added, "Be quick, if you please."

Her words were instantly followed by a man's heavy and

rapid footsteps ; and Dr. Marlow, emerging from the shadow of the trees, came in sight.

"What is the matter, Miss Haller?" he asked, anxiously.

"Seize this chain, and hold it. If you will keep this dog from getting free, I can tell you. Arthur has intruded into the castle, and——"

"And what?"

"Seen the reality of the sorrowful secret we have guarded and watched so long. Happily the Ladies Clare are in ignorance of the affair, and must be kept so. But the dog knows that the boy has been near me. Hold the chain tightly, or his life will be again in peril."

The Doctor fastened the collar more firmly, wound the chain round and round his hand, and then, taking the whip, brought it down heavily on the brute's back ; and thus, conscious that he was mastered, Nero crouched down with perfect docility. The other dogs, large and small—for Lufra and one of her pups were among the number—being commanded to "lie down," made their beds about in the fallen leaves, and were still. Dr. Marlow and Miss Haller then sat down on the felled tree and talked long and earnestly.

"You know," spoke the former, "that I have for some time seen that Arthur must be sent away to school ; indeed, the other boys also. I begin to feel that I have not the time to attend to them properly—to Arthur especially, who is a boy of rare ability, and begins to require teaching of the highest kind. My time, as you know, grows less and less, and this must necessarily be so as the end of our long vigil approaches. Therefore, to send him away, and this at once, will be the best thing. His exile, following immediately on his transgression, will teach him a valuable moral lesson, and one that may be of importance during the rest of his life. The other boys can follow in due time, though of this purpose they must for the present be kept in ignorance."

"An excellent plan : but will Mrs. Hexham permit the boy to leave her? She is very fond of him, and you must be aware that she has great independence of spirit."

"I know her characteristics,—none better. But she is reasonable, and will see that something must be done to check the boy's persistent curiosity and love of adventure. For if there should be another intrusion, and the old ladies should hear of it, as they probably would—indeed, they might encounter the intruder—there is no doubt, such are their nervous fears, that Mrs. Hexham would be dismissed, though they value her and her services so greatly. To prevent this——"

"You will not be too stern with Mrs. Hexham," interrupted Miss Haller with tenderness. "You know she has become very dear to us. Your severity must be for Arthur, who thoroughly deserves a reprimand, and something more."

A smile flitted across Dr. Marlow's face as he stroked his heavy beard ; but he merely replied, "Be sure of me in the first respect, and in the other what has to be done must be done at once. We will see how matters stand when we return to the castle ; and if I can be spared long enough, the morrow's early morn shall see me and the boy on our way to England. At Eton he will be in good keeping and good training, and there for a time he shall go."

In a few minutes both rose and went towards the castle. Here Nero was fastened up in a stout cage-like kennel occasionally used for him and the larger dogs. They then entered the house, and after an interval of some half-hour Dr. Marlow again left it, and went with rapid steps towards the Grange.

Arthur well knew that a reprimand awaited him, not only for being late, but for having neglected to take his sisters safely home. Thus his fear grew as he approached the house, for his watch told him that it was past nine o'clock.

He therefore thought he would judge how matters stood before he entered, and for this purpose he went round to the playroom window ; but, looking through, he saw no one within. Next he peeped through the oriel in the dining-room, and here he saw all the children except Freda and Kathie, who was gone to bed, gathered about the fire. They were talking in whispers, and kept anxiously looking round towards the door. This latter observation, together with the fact that Mrs. Hexham was not present, led Arthur to think that Miss Haller or Dr. Marlow was already come. He therefore stole away to the studio windows ; but the blinds were drawn, and he could see no more than the shadow of Dr. Marlow standing by the table at which Mrs. Hexham usually sat to write, though he could hear his stern and angry voice.

"You must hear reason, Mrs. Hexham," he said. "This is an unpardonable offence, and even for your sake cannot be overlooked. I shall risk any urgent need of me for at least four days, and start with him to-morrow morning. Never mind if his clothes are not ready ; I can get what he wants in London. I shall drive down by eight o'clock."

Mrs. Hexham was weeping, Arthur knew, for her reply was made in a choked and broken voice. "He has done very wrong, I grant, but—but—I feel I cannot part with the boy so readily. Arthur has his faults, but he is very dear to me." There was silence for some moments ; and then she added, "If he *must* go, I will go too ; I am the proper guardian of the boy, and you can tell this to the Ladies Clare."

"The Ladies Clare know nothing of this matter, and must not. As to *your* going, you know as well as I do you cannot ; your place is here. Now listen to me. Even for the sake of the point at issue—the teaching that disobedience has its consequences in suffering—the boy must go, and go at once. But——" Here the Doctor lowered his voice, and

Arthur could only hear that Walter and Harold were referred to ; but in what way in connexion with himself he could not comprehend.

"As usual," he muttered to himself, "old Grimwig is talking Edith over ; but I have never been so plastic in his hands. I will not go just when he likes and where he likes." He stole away from the window ; then a few paces off he stopped and searched his pockets, to find what money he had. To his dismay, he found but a shilling.

"This sum," he thought, will never do to cross Ireland and begin the world with ; otherwise I would not enter the house again. But I must ask Freda ; she is careful, and has always money to spare."

He went to the porch, and entering it, was at once clasped about the neck, and greeted with whispered and anxious words. Freda had been waiting for him for some time, with her frock gathered up about her head.

"Dear Arthur, what *is* the matter ? what has happened ? where have you been ? We waited at the house so long for you ; and we had not been home an hour, and had only just finished tea, when Dr. Marlow strode in, in a perfect fury, demanding to know where you were. What is the matter ? what have you been doing ? He is now in the studio, and mamma is crying bitterly."

"I have been into the castle and seen my Lord Minimus," the boy replied quietly ; "and the whole matter is no longer a secret to me. I hate riddles ; when there is one, I always find its solution."

"Oh, Arthur ! why have you been so wicked as to meddle with this secret ? I have always asked you not. Think how anxious the poor old ladies have been to keep it ; think how good they have been to mamma and all of us, and that poor Lord even more than they. What a cruel wrong you have done ! You ought to be ashamed ; I should be so."

"Well, I am," the boy said contritely. "I feel I have played the part of a sneak and a coward, and wish now I did not know the secret, for it is both painful and sorrowful. The only reparation I can make is to keep it, and that I will. Now I am going away ; just tell me what money you have, and lend it to me for awhile."

"What do you want it for?"

"I tell you I am going away. To sea, if I can get a berth in a ship."

"What folly you talk, Arthur ! Think of poor mamma's anguish !"

"That I cannot help. You must comfort her, and ask her to forgive me. Old Grimwig is talking of my going away. I will, but not with *him*. Now, what money have you got?"

"About two pounds fifteen shillings," sobbed poor Freda, whose terror grew as the wilful boy talked thus. "Oh, Arthur, Arthur ! do not talk of going away. I cannot part with you."

"Don't be a silly. Where is the money?"

Freda was going to say in a drawer upstairs, but she checked herself, and replied, "Perhaps it is in my desk in the schoolroom."

"Well, go and see, and do not let any one know that I am here. I will go in with you, and while you get the money I will step quietly upstairs and put some clothes in a bundle. Now, there's no time to lose ! Another minute, and that old Grimwig may be here."

Arthur opened the porch door as softly as he could, and going along the hall, went upstairs. So soon as Freda heard him close the door, she tapped on that of the studio and went in. Mrs Hexham still sat at the table, her whole posture and sorrowful face indicating great distress of mind ; while Dr. Marlow sat away at another, making what appeared to be some memoranda and calculations on a sheet

of paper. He looked round angrily at the intruder ; but Freda was too full of terror to heed him.

"Mamma," she said, as she clasped Mrs. Hexham appealingly round the neck, "Arthur is home. But he is going away again—he says to sea. He is now putting some clothes together in a bundle ; and he has asked me to lend him what money I have. Oh, please go upstairs and entreat him not to go. Our dear Arthur ! Pray go to him and implore him not to leave us. Oh dear ! I shall never be happy again if he does."

Hearing these passionate entreaties, Dr. Marlow threw down his pen, strode from the room, and up the staircase, followed by Mrs. Hexham and Freda, and in a minute or so the other children—who, hearing the heavy tread upon the stairs, were frightened and came out to see what was the matter. Just as Dr. Marlow entered the bedroom, Arthur stood by the bed tying up some boots and clothes in a handkerchief.

"What are you doing, sir?" was the Doctor's angry question.

Arthur went on quietly with his business of tying up, and did not reply.

"Arthur," spoke Mrs. Hexham firmly, yet kindly, "answer Dr. Marlow's question. I command you."

"I am preparing to go away."

"Where? What for?"

Arthur hung down his head, and was again silent.

"You *are* going away," at length said Mrs. Hexham, with great gravity ; "and to a public school in England. You have by your intrusion into Castle Morr committed a grave and—considering what the truth is—an unpardonable offence. But for him you have so greatly terrified, and who has been the most generous of friends to you, indeed to all of us, and the promised silence of Dr. Marlow and Miss Haller, we

should have to quit this place without delay ; for the Ladies Clare, were they aware of what you have done, would not forgive you, and your dismissal would include our own. Besides, your life is again unsafe from Nero—at least, it is feared so ; and thus precaution must be taken. Now, drop any mad scheme of your own, and listen to what has to be said to you.”

“Dr. Marlow is not my father,” the boy replied proudly ; “I am willing to suffer for my transgression, for transgression it has been ; and I heartily repent of it, knowing now the truth. I intruded meanly and unwisely, though my motive was simply boyish curiosity, nothing more. Or, if more, it was the resolution *not* to be baffled by a mystery which piqued me. I therefore wish to go, and will go, but not with Dr. Marlow.”

Mrs. Hexham changed colour, and her agitation was extreme. But, recovering herself, she said with firmness “Yes ! you *will* go with Dr. Marlow, and that to-morrow morning. Your departure is absolutely necessary. But this is not the place for what has to be said. Come down at once into the studio ; and there Dr. Marlow will speak to you, as he cannot before these wondering and terrified children.”

“I would rather go my own way, Edith,” replied the boy sullenly.

“Probably ; but if you do, you and I never meet again. I have been a tender friend and mother to you, and it is your duty to obey me. What is more, having transgressed as you have done, and imperilled my position here, it is as little as you can do to make reparation by obedience. Therefore, without further words, go downstairs before us.”

As she spoke, Mrs. Hexham took Arthur's arm, and made him go before—she following, and then Dr. Marlow. The

children were briefly told to go to bed. They reluctantly obeyed ; but for a long while no sleep came, and as they purposely lay with their doors ajar, they could hear much talking in the studio below, and, as they fancied, Arthur at last wept bitterly. What followed was lost to them ; for, like tired children, they at last slept.

In the morning early, when they came downstairs, they found the house astir. Arthur was packing his books, Forbes his clothes, and breakfast was ready. All the children were much grieved that he was going, and Freda and Iole wept bitterly. But Mrs. Hexham told them that if he behaved well, he might by-and-by return for his holidays ; and that before long Walter and Harold would be sent to the same school. These assurances, in a measure, consoled them.

Scarcely was breakfast over before the carriage stayed by the porch.

"Now, Arthur," said Mrs. Hexham, as she embraced him tenderly, "you have promised me, as well as Dr. Marlow, on your word of honour, not to spoil your future life by any mad scheme of running away. Ensure my love by obedience and good behaviour."

"I will—I will," replied the contrite boy.

In a few minutes more the loving and tender adieux were said, and he and Dr. Marlow were journeying rapidly across the Irish hills towards England.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORM.

AT the close of a week, Dr. Marlow returned to Morr. He gave an excellent account of Arthur, whom he had placed in one of the best boarding-houses attached to Eton College, and who had settled down at once to his studies with great apparent relish. All were delighted to hear this—especially Mrs. Hexham ; and the Doctor added, that if Walter and Harold would carry on their lessons diligently till Christmas they should join Arthur at school. He would himself attend them there, as business of various kinds would, at that date, necessitate his presence in London.

This promise gave the greatest joy to the two lads, who missed Arthur greatly, and who for a change wished for a less quiet life than that they led at Morr. Fishing, house-building, tile-painting, and gardening, were all things very well in their way ; but they often longed for a hearty game of cricket on a large scale, and to have other boys to compete with, both in lessons and play. In order, therefore, to make their removal sure, they worked very hard at their classics, German, French, and mathematics ; and to this they added a day's work, or a few hours' work, as time could be spared, on the island, or at the island-house. The little crofts had already been sown with wheat and barley, their winter cabbages were set in the garden, and the flower-beds and borders enriched with shrubs and plants. In respect to

the house, Arthur's letters were long and frequent ; and he supplemented much writing by many pretty drawings of all sorts and kinds. One time these related to locks and hinges, and their place as to closets, shelves, and window-seats ; next came a section of a roof, an outbuilding, a fence or a gate ; and of these measurements and drawings all were alike so clear, that work by their aid offered few difficulties. The boys, as also the two eldest girls, painted diligently at the tiles ; Mrs. Hexham sketching the outlines of the more elaborate ones, and the children filling in the colours. In this pleasant way winter set in and Christmas came.

Arthur spent his holidays in London ; and while there, Dr. Marlow, Walter and Harold, arrived. After a week passed in sight-seeing, the three boys were taken to school, and placed in the special care of one of the head-masters—who, when the autumn vacation came, was to accompany them to Switzerland.

Thus summer came and went, autumn and winter followed, and spring and autumn returned ; yet Arthur's exile from those he dearly loved was still continued, though Walter and Harold spent their Christmas holidays at Morr. Occasionally he felt this exile, for he longed to see Mrs. Hexham, his sisters, Lucy, and his dear little Kathie. He wondered if the work at the island-house went onward as it ought, if the shrubs grew, if the island-garden was properly cared for, and if the lonely shore, the wild untrodden hills, and the great ocean and its mighty waves, were as enchanting as of old. His eye yearned to see these things, and yet he was too proud and self-sustained to ask that his probation might end. He knew he had sinned, and deserved richly the punishment of absence. But through faith he had made some small measure of atonement ; he never spoke to living ear of what he had seen in my lord's chamber—of the secret he had so dishonourably made his own. Even the thought

of what he knew he strove to dismiss from his mind, as a matter not of right to be entertained there.

The boys and their tutor spent the autumn in Germany, returning home by way of Holland and Belgium. There it was that the sight of glorious cathedrals, town halls, and other public buildings, raised Arthur's admiration for architectural beauty and perfection to a pitch of wild enthusiasm. He was for ever sketching and making plans; and what money he had he spent in works on architecture. Thus, when he returned to school, his classical studies grew more and more distasteful to him. He longed to be an architect—to draw, to plan, to learn the true use of the rule, the plummet, and the line, and the general laws of construction, instead of studying Greek iambs and Latin quantities. So, as Christmas approached, he wrote a long letter to Dr. Marlow, stating his desire to leave Eton at the vacation, and to become pupil to some architect whose skill and taste in his profession were no matter of doubt. He said nothing to Walter or Harold about this letter, but quietly waited the result.

Arthur's return to Morr had been a subject often talked over by Miss Haller and Dr. Marlow; and occasionally Mrs. Hexham referred to it. All three were one in the opinion that the probation to which he had been subjected had been both wise and salutary; but still there was a limit to endurance—more especially with a boy of his proud and affectionate spirit. Thus, when Dr. Marlow received Arthur's letter, his scruples at once gave way; and writing briefly, but kindly, to the effect that his wishes in both respects should be acceded to, he walked over to the Grange to tell the good news. Of late he had rarely gone there, except to give the girls a Latin lesson; for both his and Miss Haller's duties had evidently become more and more absorbing and weary. All evening, at midnight, and through the long and dreary

daybreak of each winter's morn, dull lights marked my lord's sad chamber. The fine organ was rarely played upon, and notes were sent more frequently from the castle to the Grange. Probably Mrs. Hexham's work in sculpture was finished, or nearly so ; for the mason, Devellin, had left, and she but rarely spent a morning at the castle. Her chief work now lay at home, where she painted diligently so long as daylight lasted. Possibly her patron had had enough of scenes of rock, hill, shore, and sea ; for the pictures she now painted were to illustrate passages in the poems of our great new poets, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, and Morris—scenes typifying man's never-ending efforts to improve the grand old earth on which he lives, and the human lives by which he is surrounded. When such a picture was finished, she sent a note to the castle. Often she waited many days for an affirmative answer. When it did come, the carriage was sent, and she returned with it, taking her picture with her. She generally stayed some hours ; but came back always with a sad countenance, and often with eyes which seemed to have been weeping.

It was a stormy winter's morning far into December when Dr. Marlow entered Mrs. Hexham's studio to tell her the pleasant news that Arthur should return. When he had spoken she looked up brightly from her work, for her heart was very glad, and then, glancing round the room to see that no other listener was by, she said, gently,—

“ My lord does not object, I hope ? ”

“ On the contrary, it is his earnest wish. Indeed, for some months he has been desirous for the boy's return ; but Miss Haller and I thought it better for the probation to be a little longer. This is why we said nothing to you, for we well know how your heart is with Arthur. But this morning came this letter, and its plea is alike manly and irresistible.”

As he spoke, Dr. Marlow placed Arthur's letter and his

own answer thereto in Mrs. Hexham's hand. He watched her narrowly while she read them, and when she had done, she laid them together on the ledge of her easel, and said with much emotion,—

“My dearest Arthur! how glad I shall be to see him! And then, as usual, how good——”

“Yes,” interrupted Dr. Marlow, “Lord Richard is all magnanimity and kindness. I read to him Arthur's letter, and he at once said ‘The boy's wishes shall be complied with. He shall be articled to the best architect of the day, to learn truly from him the laws of architectural form, construction, and ornament; and this with the view that, when these are thoroughly mastered, he shall be no slavish follower of formulas of style—the bane of all kinds of art—but learn instead to trust to the creative promptings and instincts of the soul within him. In this way he may do good service in behalf of a much-needed want of our time—the vitalizing of constructive art.’ Thus empowered, I shall, during the vacation, inquire as to a fitting master for the lad.”

“Arthur will indeed be overjoyed. But I have not put the usual question: how is your patient this morning?”

“Very weak indeed, and the past night an utterly sleepless one. Indeed, he is so weak that the end cannot be now far off; and thus it is well that the Duke and his two sons are now at the castle. Yesterday the modelling-room was unlocked, for them to see your work. He is enchanted, and so are his sons, both of whom are travelled men. They all say it is a wonderful achievement for a woman—highly conceived, highly wrought, highly finished. It will preserve, for all who have known and loved him, that portion of poor Lord Richard's head and face which is so beautiful, while hiding, as effectually as though shrouded in the grave, his hideous form. To have conceived and accomplished such a work is, as the Duke truly says, a proof of the highest power.”

"And yet," she replied modestly, "all is not accomplished. For some effects about the eyes and forehead I must wait till after death. And often while seated here, giving what I fear is too frequently a very weak interpretation of some fine passage in our great modern poets, I recollect that a touch or an effect is wanting, or more undercutting or higher finish needed to some outstanding part. Thus, now and then, I go up to the castle for a few hours' work, and none know, I think, of my presence except the servants who give me admittance."

"I do," Dr. Marlow said emphatically; "*I* do. Not a movement or an occupation of yours but is known to me. But there are many weary hours when I cannot be absent; and Miss Haller just at present has her hands more than full, for the Ladies Clare are both far from well."

Mrs. Hexham trembled visibly.

"Yes," she replied, bending down her youthful earnest face; "in her last note to me she said that as poor Lord Richard declines, they decline." Then, changing the subject, she added in a calmer tone, "Your letter to Arthur will, I suppose, go to-day? I shall also write, and so will the girls. They will be overjoyed to welcome the boys back again, and we must all endeavour to make their holiday as bright as can be."

"We will. I am only sorry I cannot go even as far as Dublin to meet them; but one of the upper servants shall be my deputy. I trust, too, the weather may mend next week. This morning the swell and roar of the sea were terrific; and one of the coastguardsmen told me, as I came here, that a Spanish brig with all hands was lost on the rocks not far from the "Witches' Cauldron." In spite of the coastguard, and the removal of Biddy O'More and her crew further inland, the wreckers were instantly at work."

"And always will be, I fear, till a better trained and taught

generation springs up. Yes, if this weather continues, I shall be most uneasy about the boys and their passage from Holyhead to Dublin. And another fact crosses my mind : what shall we do about Nero ? You remember, when let loose after Arthur's departure, how wild he was with rage, and how for weeks he roved up and down as though in search of the lad. What can be done, Dr. Marlow ?”

“ We must take great care, and bring them together again as we did before ; and this time a keeper shall be by to shoot him down if he shows an ugly temper. But I have little fear, for the brute is human in its affections, its power of observation, and its memory. From some cause unknown to me, yet which I guess, Nero has lately taken a great affection to you. So I think if you speak very kindly to him, caress him with your hand, and then lay it upon Arthur, and tell Nero you love the boy, the dog will perfectly understand you ; at least, I think and hope so.”

Presently the conversation ended, and the Doctor went. For some time Mrs. Hexham sat motionless. Then she rose slowly, great joy shining in her face, to tell the girls that Arthur's probation was over, and that he was coming home.

They were wild with joy. They jumped round and round, they clapped their hands, they ran out of the room to tell Mrs. Forbes, the maids, Denis, and Pat. All were very glad—especially Pat and Mary. Next came the question, “ How many days would it be till the boys came ? ” They would be home three days before Christmas, and it wanted ten days till that time. Thus in seven days they would be there. What joy to think of !

That night, round the fire, the girls and Mrs. Hexham talked over the preparations to be made.

“ Among other things, we will have a very nice Christmas-tree, mamma,” said Freda ; “ for we have many things to dress it with, and we will begin at once to make others.

And don't you think we might have it at the island-house? Almost everything there is now finished, and will be a great surprise to the boys, who have no idea that we finished painting the tiles last spring, and that the last were fired before Phineas went away into Staffordshire. I think a party in our beautiful 'bird-room' would be so charming, for we never had one at the island-house in winter time."

"Well, we will see; so much depends upon the weather. If very stormy, it is so difficult to cross the headland road; and the shore, as we well know, is impassable in winter. A few days' better weather will give us hope. But so far as the season is yet gone, we have had nothing but storms of rain or snow; and old Mike, Denis tells me, prophesies a winter which will live in the memory of man. Let us hope these dismal forebodings may not come true, for this is a terrible coast. Yet men like him, who live much out of doors and face to face with nature, are often true weather prophets; being guided by an observation which rarely errs. To-morrow, if fine, and the road across the headland passable for the ponies—which from so much rain it scarcely was a few days since—we will ride to the island, sending word early in the morning to Tarra's daughters to light fires and otherwise prepare for our coming."

But the weather did not mend on the morrow, nor the next day, nor the day after. Snow fell continuously; the wind swept round and over the solitary Grange as though it would lift up every stone and rafter and bear them miles away into the gorges of the hills, and great waves beat in upon the coast with deafening roar.

Thus the days went by, and the weather did not mend; on the contrary, became worse. The journey to the island-house being thus necessarily given up, the children next hoped that the day fixed for the boys' return might be fine, so that they could ride a mile or two and meet them on the

hills. But no—the weather worsened, and the hope of this great pleasure died out. They therefore busied themselves with indoor preparations. Pat, who loved truly his “dear little mistresses—the Miss Freda, the darlint, especially,” waded through deep wreaths of snow, and gathered them large quantities of holly, ivy, and other evergreens, and with these they charmingly ornamented the various rooms; and in the hall leading from the porch they set up the words “Welcome Home,” written very largely on dark-red paper, and then twined about them the loveliest foliage of winter. They set pictures and photographs about, and dusted such knickknacks and curiosities as yet remained at the Grange. They had already worked each boy a gay pair of slippers, knitted him a warm comforter, as also a pair of mittens; and these they placed in their bedrooms with many other pretty things. Mrs. Forbes and Dina busied themselves in making cakes and pastry, and Mary warmed every room with glowing fires. The boys were dearly loved, and each heart beat quicker in expectation of their coming.

The weather was terrible! In such newspapers as reached Morr—and for full a fortnight the posts had been much delayed—were most dismal accounts of shipwrecks in the English and Irish Channels, and on the coasts generally of Great Britain and Ireland. Mrs. Hexham grew very anxious indeed, though she hid the worst of her fears from the girls; and up at the castle were others as anxious and watchful.

Two days before that on which it was expected the boys would reach Morr, the fourgon, with two stout horses, was, on account of the weather, despatched to the far-away town where the stage-coach stayed. This was to give time for slow travelling, for the snowdrifts were deep in the valleys, and snowstorms frequent on the higher portions of the mountain roads. But the day of expected return came and went,

the following also, and then the next—which was that before Christmas-day. The intensest anxiety prevailed, both at the Grange and the Castle ; and though men were sent to beat tracks across the higher hills, nothing could be seen or heard of the travellers. The girls were weary of watching from the windows or the porch ; besides, the cold was intense, and absence from the fire almost unendurable.

Christmas eve came, and the anxiety increased. But the moon, which heavy snowclouds had hidden for several nights, rose and shone brightly, and the fine, clear, frosty air mirrored its glorious light. Hitherto, for at least a week, day and night had been almost alike in their darkness, from snow and heavy sea fogs, so that this change seemed hopeful. As the evening advanced, the children went again to the porch, where Mrs. Hexham in a while followed them, and, brushing the snow from off the wide seats, wrapped fur, shawl and cloak around them, and watched again. Time thus wore on. Eight o'clock struck ; nine o'clock struck ; while Kathie had fallen asleep beneath Mrs. Hexham's shawl.

"I think, girls, we must go in now," she said at last, with saddened voice. "You will all be taking cold, and Kathie must be put to bed. But there can be no rest for us, thinking of our poor boys."

As she thus spoke, Freda started up. "I'm sure I hear distant voices—yes, I do ; and on the hills. Do look ! There, there !" And Freda pointed as she spoke.

They all looked, except the sleeping child ; and there, on the winding road far away over the descending moorland, a struggling mass of objects had just come into view ; and in a few minutes, when these objects became more distinct, the fourgon could be seen progressing slowly down the long descent,—several pairs of horses tugging in front, while men went before and others pushed the hinder wheels.

"It is the fourgon," added Freda, joyfully ; "and Dr.

Marlow is riding beside it ; and the boys, feeling sure we are watching, are waving their hats. Do look ! Now the fourgon stops again, and men in front seem digging in the snow. What a journey they must have had ! ”

“ They have indeed ; for they must have been at least three days in coming from Dublin. But we will now go in and tell Forbes the good news, and put a lamp in that window they can see best, so that they may know longing hearts and loving eyes watch for their coming.”

This was done ; but it was yet a long time before the deep drifts of snow lying in the hollows between the hills and the post-road were passed through. At a point where a track-way from the latter to the Grange led down, the fourgon stayed, and the boys, alighting, made their way as well as they could through the deep snow to the courtyard gate. From this to the porch it had been shovelled away so as to form a sort of lane, and here they were received with transports of joy by Mrs. Hexham and the girls ; while the housekeeper and the maids, and Pat and Denis, were as deeply moved and full of words as the rest. The first glance showed the home-stayers how much the lads were grown, and in every way improved in looks and manner. Arthur had, in fact, the air of a man ; and, only in a less degree, so had Walter. Harold, being much younger, was still a boy. When they had shaken the snow off their clothes and shoes, they were led into the dining-room, and to the glowing hearth piled up with peat and logs.

“ Dear Edith,” said Arthur, “ we boys love this old grey-stone Grange dearly, and have learnt that there’s no other place like it in the world. But, holla ! where’s Kathie, our little Irish fairy ? ”

“ Yes ; where’s Kathie ? ” asked the other two boys. “ You girls have all grown much, and pretty too ; but Kathie—where’s Kathie ? ”

Mrs. Hexham explained that she had watched in the porch with the rest ; but at last, growing tired, she had fallen asleep, and so had been undressed by the maids and put to bed.

"We can't do without her on such a jolly night." And so saying, Arthur strode from the room, and to the foot of the staircase, where he shouted loudly, "Kathie !" It was, perhaps, that she had been dreaming of the boys, or that the noise attending their happy entrance had awakened her. But the reality was, in a minute her pretty feet came toddling down the staircase, where at the bottom, bridling and half-abashed, she was caught up in Arthur's arms and borne into the dining-room, and to the fire.

"Well, Kathie," he said, "here I am again, to plague you and the rest. And I've bought you a regular great baby-doll. She's superbly dressed, and is named 'Victoria' ; and bearing, as she does, the name of our good Queen, I hope you will love her."

"Yes, I will. But I shall love mamma, and you, and Freda, and all the rest, before I love the doll."

"Well, that's very good of you. But, Kathie, as our return after such a journey is a great event, you must sit up to supper. Girls, get a warm shawl to put round our little one. If there's chicken for supper, she shall have the best bit."

There was chicken, and many other dainties ; for everything had been done to honour and welcome the lads. During supper, and after it, as they sat about the fire, they narrated all the circumstances of their journey from England. They had been snowed-up twice on the railway before reaching Holyhead. Next, the passage across the Irish Channel had been alike tedious and dangerous ; and the journey beyond Dublin might be compared to passing through an ocean of snow—more especially in the hilly region of central

Ireland. Several times the engine fires were put out by the melting of the snow, and twice the whole train had to be dug out of the drifts. The ordinary journey of a day and a night lasted two days and two nights ; and beyond the small town where the railway ended, and the carriage from Castle Morr waited for them, the progress made was still worse. Here it was that Dr. Marlow had met them ; and but for his energy and courage, passengers, horses and carriage, might have all been lost. He procured men and horses from farms and cabins, and when the storms of snow and wind were too terrible to be faced, especially on the mountains, they stayed and sheltered under the lee of great rocks, or sought refuge in such farmhouses as lay near. In this way they had at last accomplished this terrible journey.

"And I was to tell you," said Arthur, "that Dr. Marlow will, if possible, come down to-morrow. He could not do so to-night, as it was late, and he knew all at the castle would be so anxious—especially the Ladies Clare. And to quiet their fears on another point, he will, when he comes, bring Nero with him, so that they may be sure he will make no second attack upon me."

The snow held off next day, though the weather was stormy and the mingled roar of wind and sea was almost deafening. About noon, as the children and Mrs. Hexham sat round the fire, Dr. Marlow entered, holding Nero by his chain. The dog glanced round, saw Arthur, dropped his proud tail, and then went softly and lay down beneath the chair Dr. Marlow had taken.

"I think the dog is reconciled," he said, a little anxiously ; "yet I should be sorry to trust him too far. Speak to him, Mrs. Hexham ; since he learned so much of you while you modelled him, he has become greatly attached to you. Speak to him ; tell him you love Arthur, and that he must be good to him."

She called the great creature, and patted her knee. He rose gently, and stalking slowly to where she sat, lifted up his face and looked at her with human intelligence.

"You must be good to Arthur," she said, as she laid her hand on his back and bent her face towards his ; "the boy is very dear to me, and you must not tear him down again."

Nero looked at her, and gently wagged the long tail which lay over his back.

"Come here, Arthur, and lay your hand softly on his head, and see what he will do."

Arthur obeyed, but the dog made no sign of either peace or war, anger or pleasure.

"Nero !" said Mrs. Hexham again, in a louder voice, "you must be at peace with the boy. Look : see how I love him."

She took Arthur's hand in her own, and kissed it tenderly.

Then it was that the stately brute raised its head, and just touched Arthur's other hand with its tongue. Then it laid its great head on Mrs. Hexham's lap, and sighed heavily.

"Good beast !" spoke Mrs. Hexham again. "Lie down now ; there must be peace between you and the children."

The dog obeyed at once ; and, stretching himself out at her feet, went quietly to sleep.

"He is reconciled, I presume," said Dr. Marlow ; "or has at least some idea that the boy will not again trespass on his domain. Be this as it may, he has a most generous and royal nature. But we will take care ; he might have a fit of wilfulness, or some sudden return of his old enmity."

Dr. Marlow then spoke of his and the boys' journey through the snow, and the anxiety the Ladies Clare and others at the castle had suffered. "And their anxiety is not yet at rest," he added ; "for out of doors the weather is very bad, and there are, unfortunately, no signs of its mending. Heavy snow-clouds lie on the horizon, the wind is blowing a gale at sea, and the waves are rolling so far inland on the

coast as to obliterate its customary line for miles. The coastguard report two more wrecks with not a soul saved ; and other doomed ships may be speeding their way to this solitary and savage shore, where there lies no help for man."

"I suppose there is no danger here?" said Mrs. Hexham tremulously ; "there are seven children to care for, and our household of excellent servants——"

"And you," he interrupted, as the idea of a new and great anxiety seemed at these words to dawn upon him for the first time,—"*and you*. I have always understood this southern shore to be safe from any sudden and great inroad of the sea. The headland breaks the force of most storms, and this house lies sheltered by it and the hills. I will ask immediately I return to the castle if there is a chance of any danger. If there is, you must all remove to the castle, which stands far too high for any sea to affect it. If there be a chance of danger, the whims of the Ladies Clare are out of the question ; to the castle you must all come."

"Perhaps, Dr. Marlow," said Arthur, "Denis can tell us. He knows so much about this coast."

Denis, who was busy in the kitchen, was sent for ; and the information he gave was not assuring. In his grandfather's time, he had heard it said there was a great storm upon the coast. The waves swept a considerable way inland on the northern shore, and on the southern washed far over the site on which the Grange now stood. It was the same great sea which broke over the low upland bar into the lakes, and bore all before it as far as the hills.

More anxious still, Dr. Marlow asked many questions. "If I thought there was any peril," he said, "you should all remove to the castle to-night. The responsibility should be my own."

"I'd be aisy, sir," said Denis ; "there'd be warning and signs enough of sich a grate storm as would do this mischief,

There's many a good yard of sand yit betwixt the say and the upland ; and the tide must rise as high as that on the t'other side the headland to have force enough to reach here."

"Well, there must be caution. If the snow would melt, the getting to and fro to the castle would be so much easier."

With this information Dr. Marlow had to be content. After some further conversation, and saying that, so soon as the snow had sufficiently melted, Miss Haller would drive over and bring them Christmas presents from the Ladies Clare, he took his leave, and Nero went quietly with him.

So far as was possible, the children had a happy Christmas Day. There were bright fires and a nice dinner, and, in the evening, the Christmas tree about which the girls had been so industrious ; and there was a round game, and after it playing and singing ; but the wind rose, and the mighty roar of the sea became more deafening as night wore on. No one could rest except Kathie, who had gone to bed. By degrees talking ceased, the games were given over, and the fires burnt low. Mrs. Hexham and the girls stood by the windows to see what could be seen of the storm outside ; and Forbes and the three maids came trembling in. Denis and Pat, followed by the boys, went round to the front of the house, and, taking shelter where they could, endeavoured to find out how far the waves had advanced beyond the sands. But this they could not do, as the darkness was too intense for any human eye to penetrate. They made many gallant attempts—Arthur especially—to face the mighty wind, and cross the lawn and haha, and thence to the shore ; but no footing could be held in face of it, so prodigious was its force. Again and again the stout strong youth was thrown off his feet as though he were a reed or a sapling branch, and all that could be done was to return to the house and watch

from the windows. But the great veil of gloom was impenetrable, except twice, when a vivid flash of light crossed it, indicating that some ship had fired its signal gun of distress, and on that coast, alas ! in vain.

As midnight waned into early morning, the wind abated, and the fury of the sea grew less. Then it was that the household retired to rest ; wakening to see the sun shining, the ocean comparatively calm, and to find, as those did who went out of doors, that the air was as warm as though in some early day of spring. But on the shore were signs enough of the night's dread work ; for even this southern shore was strewn with pieces of wreck and other ocean waifs and strays ; but, though the sand had been thrown by the force of the wind into conical heaps and ridges that half filled the hahā, there were no indications that the sea had passed its ordinary bounds. As the hours went by the brightness increased, and under its genial influence the snow rapidly melted, and by night had disappeared, except upon the highest ground. But such weather might not last : it might be but a prelude to worse, as is often the case in winter time. So said old Mike, who had waded through the slush and snow to bring some fish ; and such was the opinion of more than one coastguardsman whom he had met on his way.

Mrs. Hexham grew seriously uneasy. Dr. Marlow had not been down to the Grange through the day, neither had Miss Haller ; it was more than probable that some accession to their customary duties, which of late had become most heavy, had prevented them. Thus, as she was responsible for the safety of the various pictures she had been commissioned to paint, she had them removed to a small garret formed in the centre of the roof ; and with them were conveyed many works of art belonging to herself—pictures large and small, models in wax and clay, pieces already in marble, and all working tools and removable decorations of

her studio. The boys, aided by Denis and Pat, worked heartily, and the whole of the rooms were soon bare of all but their simple furniture. It seemed likely that this precaution was unnecessary ; but it gave Mrs. Hexham peace of mind, and it was done.

Late at night came a note from Miss Haller. Dr. Marlow had heavy duties, she herself had no time to go to the Grange, the Ladies Clare were ill, and the sending of the Christmas presents must be deferred. Thus much Mrs. Hexham said by way of explanation ; but in relation to much else the note contained, she was, as customary, silent, and, as evident, very sad.

The weather on the morrow was no worse. Indeed, at noon, the sun shone out ; and the snow having melted, the roads in a degree dried up. Both boys and girls, being tired of the house, climbed the hillocks of sand and went down to the shore, and for some way along the avenue and post-road. Indeed, the former proposed after dinner to set off to the island, but Mrs. Hexham would not listen.

"To-morrow, then," they pleaded ; "we want to see our house so much." To this Arthur added, "I have been away, Edith, as you know, so much longer than the rest, and am so anxious to see how my plans have been followed out. A great fellow like me can take no harm. To-morrow, if fine, please let us go. We'll climb the steep road, and so round by the park wall, and take every care."

The early morning was comparatively fine, though the sea was rough ; and there was a wail and a moan in the wind which were saddening to the ear. As the lads wanted exercise, and were so impatient to go, Mrs. Hexham gave a reluctant consent—making them, however, promise that they would be back early in the afternoon, if not before. They all assured her they would attend to what she said, and soon set off in high spirits.

The hour was early—not more than nine o'clock, for they had breakfasted, as customary, at eight. When they reached the top of the headland, over which ran the park wall, at a distance of about two hundred yards from the edge of the cliff, they came upon two of the coastguardsmen, who with their powerful telescopes were looking far away over the ocean. The boys, knowing them, stayed to speak, and asked what they were searching for.

"A large ship," they replied. "It is but a mere speck on the horizon, yet something must be amiss for it to be bearing down upon this coast. Perhaps it has been in some way disabled by the storm of the night before last."

The boys looked through the telescopes ; but with their vision, unaccustomed like that of the men to long distances, they could discern nothing.

"It is a ship, however," replied the men ; "and what is worse, there's more ugly weather brewing. There is a dirty sky, and the wind is rising."

The boys had said "good morning," and passed on, when one of the men called out gruffly, "Where are you going, young gentlemen ?"

"To the island on Lake Morr," replied Walter, who was a little behind the others. "We have a house there."

"I'd turn back, then," continued the man. "I don't like the appearance of the sky. Very bad weather signals have been received at the stations all round the coast."

Walter hurried after Arthur, and, staying him, repeated the man's words.

"Oh, nonsense ! That man's an old woman. We cannot go back. I must see the house, and we can take no harm. Come on."

The coastguardsmen shook their heads as the boys passed out of sight.

"If we have another storm the sea may beat over into the

"Take," observed one man to the other ; "and then the house those lads have built will stand no better than one of cards. We will look in at the Grange as we pass, and tell the lady so."

But the men stood watching the ship a long time, and the morning passed on.

It was arranged, before the boys left home, that the family dinner should be served at the usual hour, and that they should have cold meat with their tea on their return. It being holiday-time, there were no formal lessons ; but Lucy went into the schoolroom to practise her music, and Freda and Iole sat down each one to a task in drawing Mrs. Hexham had set them a few days previously. While they worked they noticed that the room grew very dark, and when at about twelve o'clock Freda rose to take in her drawing to show Mrs. Hexham, the darkness was still greater. In the studio it was likewise dark, though that room had several windows facing the sea ; and, unable to paint, Mrs. Hexham had just risen and gone to one of them to look out. Little could be seen outside, for the darkness in the foreground increased every moment ; and beyond lay the vast and inky blackness of the ocean, only relieved every few minutes by the lines of foam which crested the mighty breakers as they rolled in-shore, and on which incidentally fell any ray of light that pierced the intense gloom of the sky.

"Another storm is coming on, I fear, Freda," she said in great distress ; "and the boys away. I have been blaming myself for the past half-hour for permitting them to go."

"You could scarcely help it, mamma," replied Freda ; "the morning broke so fine, and the boys—Arthur especially—were so impatient to be off to the island. Let us hope they will be back before there is any danger."

At this moment Mary knocked and entered the studio.

"If you please, ma'am," she said, "two of the coastguardsmen have called to say that they are uneasy about the young gentlemen. They crossed the headland while they were there, and, though warned, they would go on. A great storm is blowing up, they say."

"What can be done?" replied Mrs. Hexham, in much distress. "Denis and Pat must at once go after them."

"The men say there is now no crossing the headland. When they left it, an hour ago, they could scarce keep their feet; and since then the gale has increased. The only help now possible is from the castle shore of the lake."

"Then let the men go to the castle at once. Or stay: I will speak to them myself."

The men were called in, but they stated they had their duties to attend to, and were due at certain hours at certain places. At length, however, seeing the lady's great distress, one consented to accompany old Denis to the castle, and advise with Dr. Marlow as to the urgent necessity of sending across to the island for the boys as soon as might be, whether there was danger or not.

The men and old Denis departed; and the day wore on, with no abatement of the intense darkness. The gale seemed to increase, and its roar, mingled with that of the sea, was awful. Those speaking in the house could scarcely hear each other; and every fresh gust seemed as though it would burst through the casements and scatter all before it.

Lamps and candles were lighted, and dinner was served, though little was eaten. The afternoon wore on, evening came, and the anxiety of all within the house increased, for the roar of the ocean sounded nearer than at noon. Mrs. Hexham and the housekeeper hurried, as they had previously done several times, upstairs to the windows facing the sea, to ascertain, if possible, if the waves had really encroached so far as to endanger the safety of the house; but their

vision could not penetrate the gloom, nor was it possible to open a casement, on account of the fury of the wind.

Scarcely had they returned to the lower floor, before there was appalling evidence that the waves were near, if not close upon, the house ; for first the violent dashing of water upon the casements was heard, and then a few seconds after the casements themselves were borne in, and a deluge of water followed. Already the servants had rushed forwards screaming, while following and intermingling with them were several men, though in the confusion no one could see or know who they were, for the fires were already extinguished and almost all the lamps overturned by the fury of the gale, that, penetrating every nook and cranny of the house, swept all before it. The lamp in the hall alone gave light.

"There is not a moment to lose," called out a deep manly voice which all recognised to be that of Dr. Marlow ; "the house itself is in danger. Mrs. Hexham, Freda, Lucy, Iole, Kathie, Mrs. Forbes, where are you all? Men, look about you ; every moment is precious."

As these words were spoken, Mrs. Hexham felt herself lifted off her feet and borne through the fast rising water to the rear of the house, and thence to a spot some hundred or more yards beyond, where the ground rose rapidly.

"Save the children," were her words as she was thus borne on : "let them be cared for first." But no response came ; and when her feet again touched the ground, she found in the next instant that she was alone. All that there was to see by in the intense gloom was a coastguardsman's lantern set safely in a hollow formed by some scattered stones, which presently she recollected stood about midway in a steep slip of paddock lying between the rear of the out-houses and stabling and the post-road. The gale blew furiously, and the roar of the ocean was appalling. In an

incredibly short time Freda was borne safely to her side by a stout coastguardsman ; and other men followed with the rest of the household, excepting Kathie, who was missing when Dr. Marlow returned with Lucy in his arms.

A chill of terror ran through the little throng.

"Without doubt she is in bed in Mrs. Hexham's room," said Forbes with great self-reproach—for in the dread confusion she had forgotten her little favourite. "I put her to bed about an hour ago, when she followed me upstairs and cried because she was frightened. I put her in her little bed in Mrs. Hexham's room, and told her if she dried her tears and tried to go to sleep, God would take care of her. This was before we knew that the sea was close upon the house."

"Men," said Dr. Marlow, "we must rescue the child, come what may, though the water is already up to the ceilings of the lower rooms. Pat ! lead the ladies and the rest as quickly as possible up the slope to the road. A carriage is waiting there. Tell the men to drive as rapidly as they can to the castle, where good fires and every care await them. And then return here."

"The boys ! what about them ?" But no reply came, for Dr. Marlow was gone.

Pat led the way up the slope to the carriage, which stood at a short distance onwards, under the shelter of the avenue, or otherwise the two men attending it could not have kept their feet—so furiously blew the gale, and so drenching was the mingled spray and sea-mist. It was a covered wagonette or omnibus into which they all hurried, drenched as they were, for there had been no time to put on any outdoor covering, not even a shawl.

"Can you tell me anything of the young gentlemen ?" Mrs. Hexham asked as the man closed the door.

"A boat was sent over to the island from the castle

landing-place, I believe, ma'am," the man answered. "We know nothing more, as it is some time since we left home."

With difficulty the horses made their way along the more open portions of the road—the two men, who carried lanterns, having to lead them. But at length the carriage reached the castle gates, and, passing in, Mrs. Hexham and the children were welcomed at one of the entrances by Miss Haller and a group of female servants. Anxiety and fear were expressed in every face.

"Thank God you are safe!" said the German lady; "we almost feared it. The Ladies Clare and our poor patient are half dead with terror. The terrible sea—the terrible sea—has come upon us all so fearfully and unexpectedly!" Miss Haller looked at the group before her, and then added, instantly, "Where is our darling Kathie?"

"She was upstairs in bed when the water burst through the windows," replied Forbes; "and in the moment of confusion and darkness—for the lights were nearly all put out—she was lost sight of. God forgive me for my want of thought! But Dr. Marlow and the men are staying behind, and we hope she will be saved and here before long."

"God grant it!" exclaimed Mrs. Hexham. "And my boys? Miss Haller, tell me the worst."

"Walter and Harold are safe and here; they were rescued from the island just as the sea broke over into the lake. They are now on the terrace, anxiously watching the men in their attempt to save Arthur, who, as yet, has not been brought over."

"Not saved! My boy—my darling!" As she spoke, Mrs. Hexham fell senseless into the arms of those nearest to her.

She was borne into a room which had been prepared for her, and where every luxury which great wealth can procure

was present. But she was for a long time insensible, and when she recovered, consciousness gave place to sleep.

When she awoke, which she did after a while, and began to realize her surroundings and where she was, she saw she was alone in the room with Freda and several female servants, all of whom were grouped about the windows in a state of great excitement and fear. The wind had a little abated, the moon showed herself on the edge of a pall of dark clouds, but the roar of the sea was still terrible to hear. It filled the whole castle as though with the bray of mighty trumpets or the thunders of a tropical storm. Mrs. Hexham tried to rise ; but Freda, hearing her move, hurried from the window and put her arms about her.

"You must lie still, mamma," she said ; "Dr. Marlow told us you must be kept quiet. Just as you recovered from your faintness and fell asleep, both he and Miss Haller were called away. Now he is out with the coastguardsmen and others, trying to save poor Arthur." At these words Freda burst into tears, and, excited by the terrified exclamations of the servants, she unwound her arms and ran back to the windows. Terrified too, Mrs. Hexham rose and followed her feebly ; for the overwhelming horrors of the night had given her a great mental and nervous shock.

And what a scene lay before her gaze !—for the mist had cleared off a little, and the moon shone clearer still. The slight opposing barrier of the upland, with its fine sward, its picturesque clumps of furze and juniper and pretty thyme-clad knolls, had all been washed away, and given space, as probably it had often done before in centuries unremembered by men, to the inroads of the all-devouring sea ; and now vast towering breakers, as black as ebony and crested with foam, stalked in from the open sea like so many hungry and insatiable giants. All signs of the lake were obliterated ; and from the castle terrace to the woods on the far shore, in

which Tarra the potter dwelt, stretched an arm of the sea, much like a Scottish or Norwegian fiord, and from thence along the chain of lakes into the hollows of the hills. Not a vestige of the island or island-house was visible, except the upper portion of the highest tower. Towards this the angry breakers seemed to stalk, as though bent on overthrowing it if the power were theirs.

It was evident to those who thus anxiously watched from the windows—and all were watchers on that night—that some one was on the roof of this tower ; for the slim, tall figure of a youth verging on manhood could be seen. Towards this figure the coastguardsmen, headed by their captain, and a crowd of other men, were attempting to throw a safety-rocket without avail—for, just as it was thrown and nearly reached the tower, a mighty breaker overwhelmed it ; and the passage of the coastguardsmen's life-boat was, for the same reason, impossible. So soon as it entered the breakers, it was submerged, and the men piloted it in vain.

Mrs. Hexham could see Dr. Marlow, standing far into the water urging the men, and, at the rear, stood Walter and Harold. The scene was a striking one, for the excitement was intense, and each one seemed reckless of himself in his efforts to save the boy.

In a moment several men called out, so loudly that the sound of their voices penetrated into many of the castle rooms, though the insatiable sea roared on like hungry lions needing prey, "The tower is going ! The next wave will strike it down ! The poor lad !" This fear seemed about to be realized, for the tower of the island-house visibly rocked as the last great wave broke its force upon it.

At this moment, when every eye was bent upon the tower, and every heart in every breast sank with fear, there hurried into view from the more private portion of the castle the

man the children had so often noticed at the balconied and other windows, and going to and fro in the various rooms and on the terrace as messenger to the Ladies Clare. He was bare-headed, and came at a run with Nero beside him. Holding the dog by the collar, he stooped and said something to Dr. Marlow, who in turn spoke to the chief officer of the coastguard. Action was the result of these words, for in another moment the man had released his hold of Nero's collar, and the splendid creature at a bound had leapt into the waves.

"Bravo ! bravo !" the men cried. "Save the boy !"

The noble animal breasted gallantly the mighty waves ; but as it neared the tower it was thrice repulsed by the force of the water breaking over it. A fourth time it gallantly sprang forward, to be again repulsed and thrown back by a mighty wave, which, cresting the tower, hurled down its upper portion. Nero was evidently struck and injured, as for a few seconds it succumbed and was lost to sight amid the mighty turmoil of the water. But soon it was seen again cresting the waves, and next seizing with its teeth something which had fallen with the wreck of the tower. Once or twice the dog had to renew its grip, for it was evidently spent. Then it turned and came slowly towards the terrace-shore. It faltered : the coastguardsmen dashed into the waves to meet it ; and, partly swimming, partly wading, bore it and what it held with difficulty to dry land. The dog had been fearfully injured on the head by the stones which had fallen on it, and, after a gasp or two, stretched itself out and died. But even then it still grasped the boy's coat-sleeve with its teeth, and the piece had to be torn away. Arthur was saved, though exhibiting for some time the appearance of one lately drowned.

Thus by giving up its life to save him the creature made

atonement for the wrong once done, and was "very good" to the lad, as it had been told to be by those it loved.

* * * * *

A week after the great storm—the like of which was unknown on that wild western coast of Ireland—the sea had returned to its customary limits, and the January morning was bright, clear, and comparatively warm. But the traces of the storm were yet very evident. The water of the chain of lakes was very brackish; and the shores on either side were covered with millions of tons of sand, uprooted trees, pieces of timber and great stones. Much of the castle park and grounds was thus obliterated, and though the island and the island-house had stood the buffeting of the waves in a marvellous manner, all the pretty fields and gardens were covered over with mud and sand, the larger part of its woodland was washed away, the upper portion of the towers was in ruin, and all the interior of the house, and all it held, was more or less damaged and destroyed. Yet the island and island-house were there, and the children's hearts were buoyed with hope that in time and with earnest labour they might renew the beauty and perfection of what they had helped to make so beautiful and perfect.

In the deep cutting made by the inroads of the sea, and on all the banks around and above it, a large number of men were busy with spades and barrows on this fine morning. These men—tenants, farmers and labourers—had been gathered by the steward at Islandmore from all available parts of the surrounding country. It was necessary, in case of any high tides, to save the lakes from being again inundated, and thus these men had been at work almost night and day since the day but one after the great storm. The peril of another inroad of the sea had to be guarded against, and there was no time to lose.

It was about nine o'clock on this fine morning; and in the

great courtyard on the other side the castle six coastguardsmen stood waiting, and near them were several grooms with horses and ponies. The former were doubtless bound on some expedition, for they carried several large packages tied up in waterproof coverings. They had not to wait long, for a door opened, and Dr. Marlow and the three boys came out—Arthur looking none the worse for the perils he had encountered on the night of the great storm. All were well wrapped up, as though for a long journey, and they proceeded to mount at once. Just as Dr. Marlow was placing his foot in the stirrup, a servant came out and spoke to him ; so returning into the hall, he encountered Miss Haller.

"I have to repeat," she said in a low voice—"though of course it is unnecessary—the Ladies Clare's desire that you will not stay away a moment longer than is requisite. They know your merciful errand, and the summons you have had from the captain of the coastguard ; still they are very anxious, our poor patient appearing to be so weak this morning."

"I know it—I sadly know it," he replied ; "and every minute I am away will be an anxious one to me. I hope to be home by four, latest five o'clock ; meanwhile, if Madison administers the medicine and nourishment needed, all will go on as though I were by. Mrs. Hexham must also have your loving care, for she has received a great physical and mental shock, from which it will take some time to recover. And the girls must all be kept warm and in their beds, for they have all bad colds, Kathie especially. No wonder !—when I rescued her, we were both like drowned rats. There is not a moment to lose. Good morning !"

Dr. Marlow shook the lady by the hand, and, going forth, mounted and rode away, followed by the boys and coast-guard, who were mounted too. Emerging from the chief entrance past the porter's lodge, they followed the road as it

wound its steep way over the headland ; but on the other side, where the labourers were at work, their difficulties began. They had all more than once to dismount and lead the animals through great fissures, or over bridges extemporised for the purpose by the labourers at work from planks nearest at hand. At length they crossed the creek where old Mike's cottage had stood—as it had been swept away, though he and his old dame had happily escaped. For, seeing the the great storm which was coming on, Mike with much prudence had removed his lobster pots and cauldron, his fishing nets and few household goods to a cave in the woods, and then repaired to Tarra's cottage. Here he and his wife had had a hearty welcome till the storm was over. They then both removed to the castle, where, in a large snug room running with others over a great coachhouse, a most comfortable home had been in the course of a few hours made ready for them. And here, by the Ladies Clare's desire, they were to remain till their cottage could be rebuilt.

Once past the creek, and on the wild and desolate shore which lay to the north of Castle Morr, the terrible nature of the great storm which had so recently swept over this part of the western coast was shown by the havoc it had effected. Wide channels, often broadening into the dimensions of lakes, were hollowed out far into the land, vast mounds of sand of every shape and size stretched away till lost to sight, and huge fragments of rock, vast boulder-stones, uprooted trees, and massive planks and other great pieces of timber, gave melancholy proof of the ruin the cruel sea had wrought.

The difficulties connected with crossing these mounds of sand, and in some cases of rounding them at points far inland, made the journey slow and very toilsome ; and the wading through the creeks and hollows was even still worse. Generally speaking, the way had to be taken at a considerable distance from the shore ; for great billows still

surged amid the rocks, and crested them with mighty wreaths of foam. At the several points where lay the "Witches' Cauldron," the "Devil's Net," "Deadman's Yard," and "Timber Cove," no actual view could be obtained, for they were covered to a great depth by towering breakers that broke over them in deafening and continuous roar. Inland, the bogs and wastes were more or less covered with sand, and scarcely anything green came into view, except on the sides and summits of the distant hills, where sward and alpine shrubs were still varied by wide breadths of snow.

Unweariedly pursuing their way, the little party reached the coastguardsmen's hut about two o'clock in the afternoon. From standing in a wide hollow thickly fringed by a flourishing belt of arbutus shrubs, the hut had escaped all injury from the storm ; its only signs being the wetness of the thatched roof, and the thin sprinkling of the same mingled sand and minute shells which covered the velvety turf around.

Within the hut was a fire, and in hammocks suspended from the roof were two poor shiprecked men carefully tended by one of the coastguard. They had been found two days after the storm lying out on some wild rocks which barely escaped the influx of the tides. They were nearly naked, and all but dead from cold and exposure ; and, in addition, the one had a severely fractured thigh, and the other was badly bruised all over. Very glad that they had found them, and compassionating their terrible condition, the coastguard had, with great difficulty, conveyed them to their hut, and there warmed, fed, and cared for them. But the surgical and medical aid they required was beyond their skill and knowledge. So late on the previous night one of them had reached the castle and implored the Doctor's aid, as his great skill was widely known, and no other was to be had nearer than in a village a long way from Islandmore.

He reluctantly consented ; but the man with the fractured limb must die if not attended to,—indeed, as it was, surgical aid had been far too long delayed.

Entering, the Doctor set about his task of examining the men and attending to their needs at once. He was interested in their case, as the coastguardsman had told him on the previous night that they were both young, and had formed part of the crew of an Australian ship which had foundered on the night of the great storm. Two days previously it lost its rudder and became otherwise unmanageable in the Bay of Biscay ; and, thus helpless, had drifted out of all reckoning and on to the fatal coast north of Castle Morr. Every effort had been made by the crew and captain to save it, but in vain ; and it foundered in the gale with every soul on board. A few clung to the lofty rigging, and remained there through the perils of the night ; then, one by one, they succumbed to cold and fatigue, and were swept inland by the waves. Two only found perilous footing on the rocks, and, after much suffering, made their slow way beyond immediate danger from the sea. But here even more cruel dangers met them. The wreckers pounced upon them, stripped them of their outer clothing, and left them to die of cold and hunger. And dying they really were, when the coastguard humanely rescued them, and bore them to the shelter of their hut.

It was this Australian vessel that Arthur had been watching through the telescope when the mighty storm came on, which, in an incredibly short space of time, turned the lakes into an open sea. Seeing the great danger, a boat had put off from the castle grounds, and rescued in the nick of time the younger lads. But in the deafening roar no shouts could reach Arthur's ear, and before any one could ascend the winding stairs of the tower, the rescuers and the younger lads had to flee into the boat and urge it across the troubled waters, for the flood was already in the island-house, and the moun-

tainous breakers, like mighty giants, were forcing a way through the upland bar. Thus Arthur felt an interest in these poor fellows, and, being present when the coastguardsmen pleaded their cause, he, in turn with Walter and Harold, had begged hard to accompany the Doctor and coastguardsmen on the following morning on their journey along the shore.

The men had been far too ill to converse ; but from a few whispered words dropped now and then, the coastguard had learnt that the one with the fractured thigh was English, and an able-bodied seaman ; the other Irish, and steward of the ill-fated ship. When the fracture was reduced, and refreshment given to both, they were each wrapped in blankets and covered with tarpaulin covers. Their hammocks were then fastened to poles, each hammock to be carried by four men, and so made ready for the return journey to Castle Morr, which was begun with no more delay than sufficed to refresh men and animals and lock up the hut.

This journey proved to be a toilsome one, for the weather was not so fine as in the morning, and the shades of the winter's evening soon gathered. Thus it was full two hours past the promised time when the little company, full weary—the coastguardsmen, on foot and bearing the hammock, especially—began to descend the road which, running round the park wall, led to the gates of entrance. Here they were met by two men carrying lanterns, who, leading the Doctor apart, spoke to him hurriedly. No sooner had he heard their message, than, in spite of the growing darkness, he urged his horse onwards, calling out as he did so to the men,—

“Go carefully with the hammocks to the great stableyard, and there, above one of the coach-houses, you will find a room made ready. I will send some one to you who shall help to put the men carefully to bed ; by-and-by I will see them if I can.

Aided by the lanterns the servants carried, the coastguard had soon passed the lodge and into the stableyard. Here, ascending a wide staircase leading from an open passage, they found a room well warmed, and beds made ready. The only person present was old Mike's wife, whose new home was not far distant; but she helped to lay the men in their beds, and give them some nourishing soup, which, sent from the castle kitchen, had been kept warm on the hob. The coastguard then said "good-night," and departed to the servants' hall to supper, prior to a further walk to their quarters at Islandmore, where they had to report themselves that night.

It was about an hour after this that a somewhat portly woman, wearing much the appearance of a superior nurse, entered the servants' hall, where sat the stout porter and old Denis—the former smoking his pipe and reading a newspaper. The servants' supper was just over, and two kitchenmaids were clearing away the dishes.

Observing the nurse, the porter took the pipe from his mouth and made an inquiry in an undertone, to which the nurse only replied by a sorrowful shake of her head.

"We've bin a-looking for it this many a day, Mrs. Graham," he said, with a shake of his head and the tone of an undertaker. "For, however the Lord may ha' made us, the same end comes to all." With this sage remark he resumed his pipe.

"And how is Denis?" asked nurse in a whisper, and pointing to the old man, who sat by the bright hearth with his face bent on his breast as though asleep.

"You've bin long enough here, Mrs. Graham, to know his brains are scattery like, and ha' bin that 'ere way ever since his lad went to sea. He brightened amazingly up at the Grange, for he liked his life there, and loved the children, and Mrs. Hexham and the housekeeper were both

so good to him. But ever since the sea broke over the house, and he was dragged out of it half drowned, he has been like one without senses at all,—heeding nothing, sitting the day through jist as he does now, and, what's most surprising to me, with no care for his wittles; for though the nicest cuts are put on his plate, he eats no more nor a sparrer. So jist to tell you the truth, nuss, I don't think much of *his* life." And the worthy porter shook his head ominously.

"True! this is a sad house of sickness, for my poor ladies are so ill and troubled, and Mrs. Hexham still in bed, though better to-night. Added to these—as I daresay you know—the coastguard have brought two poor shipwrecked fellows here to be nursed and cared for. I am now going to see that they are all right, and have what is needed; for mine was a regular hospital training—fever, accidents, and general cases. I cannot stay long, for the Doctor wants me."

"Yes," replied the porter, taking somewhat unwillingly the pipe from his mouth; "them poor fellows! There was a deal of talk at supper, and the coastguard chaps give us a reg'lar account of 'em. I shall go up and see 'em to-morrow, and carry 'em a bit o' baccy."

"Not till their fever is abated," said nurse quickly, and a little severely; "fever and accidents require perfect quietude." So saying, she took up her lamp, which for the moment she had set down on the edge of the long dining-table, and went her way.

For some half-hour there was perfect stillness in the room, and then old Denis, lifting up his head, said softly, —

"Would ye be tilling me what Graham said about two shipwrecked sailors?"

"Didn't you listen at supper, when we was all a-talking?"

"No! masther; me didn't heed."

"I might ha' thought so, for you don't do now-a-days like t'other folks. Well, an Australian ship lost its rudder in the

Bay o' Biscay, and got out of its reckoning—as it jist did to be on the western coast of Ireland—and foundered on the rocks beyond the 'Witches' Cauldron.' There were many passengers and sailors on board, but only two of the crew got safe to land, and barely that. There, as they lay helpless and perishing with cold, those wreckers from the bogs pounced down on 'em, and stripped 'em to their shirts. And so they would ha' died, as many a one has done through such cruelty and wrong, but the coastguard came on 'em and took 'em to their hut. Now to-night they have been brought here, for the Doctor and Graham to see to, for one of the poor creturs has a fractured thigh and the other is bad with fever."

Old Denis groaned ; and, raising his face, said as though to himself,—

"Two sailors ! Shure I must say to it. Many a year I've bin lookin' for me poor boy, and he ain't come yit."

"No ! and never will now," said the porter, a little unfeelingly ; "the day's bin too long. So don't addle yer head any more about that matter. Go to bed, and get bright and right to go back to the Grange, for the lady and children will be wanting yer."

Presently, having finished his newspaper and pipe, the porter went off to bed ; and one of the kitchen servants coming in to see that the lights and fire were out, old Denis took the hint and went his way to a room which had been assigned to him and Pat in some outbuildings across the stableyard. In passing thither he might have observed, if his wits had been as bright as in former days, that something unusual was afloat in the castle, for lights were burning in many rooms, and figures passed and repassed up and down the various staircases. Then a man like a valet came forth from a private entrance, and, passing into the stables, he could be heard calling up the grooms—whose rooms were above—and soon after they were moving among their horses. But

old Denis heeded none of these things, for another object absorbed his impaired faculties.

He went into the open passage and up the staircase, and paused at the door of the room where the seamen lay. After listening some time, he lifted the latch and stole in. A good fire burnt in the grate, and on either side of it sat one of the grooms and old Mike's wife. Both, as was evident, were unaccustomed nurses, and had fallen asleep ; so Denis crept forward to the beds the sick men occupied. He gave but a glance at the first, and then passed on to the other ; but here his curiosity was baffled, for just as he was about to bend over him and look, the sick man stirred, and, calling feebly to his nurses, asked for drink. Terrified by the voice, and fearing to be observed, the old man started back into the shadows of the room ; and, lifting the latch, again went forth. He passed down the staircase and stood at the opening of the passage a long time. He was dead to all else but the sound of the voice which had met his ear, or he would have noticed that two men mounted, and wrapped up as though for a long journey, passed on their way to the outer gates, and so by the post-road in the lonely moonlit shadows of the hills.

A long hour after, old Denis ascended the staircase and crept again into the room. He approached the bed, and feasted his somewhat dim eyes on the restless sleeper. Then he stooped down and bared the sleeper's arm ; and there, as he had judged, guided by the sleeper's voice, he found two mole spots, answering to two his son had borne. No more than this was ever known ; for, at break of day, there the old man was found kneeling, but dead and cold.

It was his son—the son he had so long desired to see ; but, enfeebled in mind and body, his recognition had no voice, for power and speech alike lapsed into unconsciousness and eternal silence.

CHAPTER XI.

VEILED IN MARBLE.

THE weather of this January was very cold, but the days were comparatively free from storm and clouds, and the long nights were brilliant with the glory of moon and stars.

For full a week after the night referred to, visitors continued to arrive at Castle Morr from distant parts of England, Scotland, and Ireland. They were all titled men, and more or less related to each other—those elderly and of middle age being in majority.

Thus assembled, and evening having come, after great silence had reigned in the castle for some hours, there issued from the chief entrance, between the hours of nine and ten o'clock, a small procession, consisting of a hearse and three private carriages. It took its way by the post-road towards the hills, and there, passing into their recesses, was soon lost to sight. Not a human eye beheld it, for there was no voluntary traveller abroad at such an hour and at such a season. Here and there a few sheep or colts upon the hilly misty wastes turned to gaze with dull-eyed unconsciousness, or a night bird flitted past on rapid wing. Otherwise no living thing beheld it, and whether passing through broad stretches of mingled mist and shadow, or those still wider of fairest moonlight, the mystery and silence of its progress were unbroken. Thus it went onward, and was lost to sight. A few hours later the little procession at

a quicker pace returned ; and, when morning broke upon the sea, all relating to it had passed into silence and oblivion.

That day and the next, most of the visitors remained at the castle ; and during that time several masons, among whom was Devellin, were busy in removing from a distant room into the great hall a recumbent figure finely wrought in marble. It was covered with a great sheet, and not till the men had placed it in the light of a wide embayed window was this withdrawn. Then the Ladies Clare, much broken by sickness, age, and grief, and clad in deep mourning, came to look, and with them were their visitors ; next came the servants, and far later in the day, when there was great hush and stillness in the castle, the children, accompanied by Miss Haller, came also, with burning wonder and great interest too, for here might be some explanation of the mystery of which they had so longed to know the truth, and here was the fruit of their beloved lady's work, dear to them as the dearest mother, though merely one in name. They loved her with all their hearts, and thought all she did was perfect.

Upon the semblance of a couch, raised about three feet from the ground, lay what seemed at first a somewhat square-shaped figure, so thickly was it veiled in a great winding-sheet exquisitely wrought in marble. This sheet lay high above the couch, for it was partly supported at the head by the sculptured semblance of the great dog Nero, curled up asleep, and at the foot by the figures of Mrs. Hexham's Lufra, and another dog of the same breed, and which the children knew was a great favourite and named Doric. At the foot, naughty Trick, the magpie, perched on a thick fold of the sheet, had been wrought ; and at the side, in his finest pincushion shape, Mr. Bob seemed to purr and doze. At the head, just below the figure of the great dog, the marble winding-sheet was fastened by the semblance of a

large pin ; and thence open, from the nostrils to the crown of the forehead, were seen the features of a man in the prime of life, and of the highest order of intellectual beauty. All else of this human figure was veiled beneath the winding-sheet, after the beautiful custom of the Middle Ages. It might be guessed, as was indeed the sorrowful truth, that all beneath the marble sheet had been purposely and most artistically veiled, so as to hide that which was painful and repulsive. For just below the gathered folds where the fastening was, was obviously a hideous protuberance to right and left. Below that again, with scarcely space for a human throat, was another great deformity, which even the rarest skill in the disposal of drapery did not wholly hide ; and some little way below was a mere blank beneath the marble pall. A lapse on the left side was also obvious ; but the outstanding of the marble on the right side indicated a well-formed arm, and a beautiful hand lay without the covering as far as the wrist. Such was the silent figure on its marble couch ; the sculptured sheet falling in many parts almost to the ground, especially over the pillow and beyond. Whether viewed as a whole or in detail, it was a noble piece of workmanship, and by its excellence fully rewarded the patient and earnest artist.

Arthur, who through the fact of his reprehensible curiosity had seen the original, recognised the recumbent figure at once, as did also Freda, who had found one of the sketches made preparatory to modelling ; but to the other children there was more or less a mystery and a fear, which they wished to have solved, but that they were too abashed to question. In fact, the mystery so long maintained, the repression of all inquiry so rigidly enforced, the consciousness that there was an important secret which, though guarded with great care and skill, might at any time be divulged, had induced in each and all of them, except Kathie,

a sort of chilly fear they could not master, and which in the present moment enchained them, as it were, though concealment was no longer needed. Thus, with the exception of so mere a child as Kathie, they all stood dumb in the presence of the silent effigy.

"What is it?" asked Kathie; "is it a poor man?"

"A poor gentleman," replied Miss Haller, whose hand held tenderly that of the child, "who could never walk or talk much. Yet he was very good to Kathie's mamma—indeed, to everybody—and he sent Kathie all her beautiful toys and dolls, though she did not know it."

"That was very good of the gentleman. Tell me all about him. Why did he not walk, and what was his name?"

"His name was Lord Richard Donore. But I cannot tell you more just now; when you are bigger, Freda shall tell you this sorrowful story."

"She will tell me, I know, for Freda is always so good to me. But why did the poor gentleman want all my mamma's pets?"

"Because he loved all worthy things which had life. Lufy came with your mamma to see him, and taking a fancy to Doric, a beautiful Skye dog like herself, stayed for good. Bob strayed in through the balcony window one night, and returning again and again, was petted, and went away no more. Trick, flying in on some of his thievish errands, proved to be highly amusing to the poor gentleman. He was therefore sometimes put in a cage, and kept for a day or two together. But now the poor gentleman, being dead, will want pets no more, and Kathie's dear mamma will have them all."

"Nero too?"

"No; you know he is dead. He died in saving Arthur."

"I love Arthur, so I am glad."

"Yes! and Kathie shall hear all this sorrowful story by-and-by. We will go now."

And Miss Haller, leading the little maid forth from the hall, consigned her to the care of Dina, who was in waiting, and then went with the elder children into one of those splendid rooms which fronted the great terrace, and looked over the distant and, at this hour, moonlit sea.

They were quite alone, and Miss Haller sat down with them about the fire. A great hush and stillness reigned, as was befitting.

"This poor gentleman, whose recumbent figure you have just seen," she said, "was the son of a wealthy English duke, and was born just five-and-forty years ago. His mother, who was a most beautiful young lady, died in giving him birth, being already the mother of four sons. Dying thus, she was spared the great agony of knowing that her child was so hideously deformed that the like had been rarely seen. He had no legs—only rounded stumps, just ending where the knees should have been. He had but one arm, and that the right, scarcely any throat, and on both his back and breast were great humps. But his mouth exceeded all in hideousness, for it was like that of an animal, and could give no fashion to anything like human speech—only to what was little better than a gobble or a painful animal cry. Doctors from far and near came to see this sorrowful caricature of humanity; and some thought it best that he should be suffered to die, as he was weak and sickly, rather than that a long life of great physical suffering should be endured; for suffering was necessarily the lot of any one who could never hope to walk or speak, and who had but one hand. But the Ladies Mary and Isabella Clare, who loved their sister passionately and had been summoned to her dying bed, said 'No,'—their sister's poor offspring should live, and they, so long as he might survive, would be his guardians and nurses. Lady Mary was at that time about to be married; but both she and Lady Isabel gave up all

thoughts of matrimony, and, making their arrangements, came away here to this solitary part of western Ireland, bringing their charge with them. This castle and its wide domain belonged to their family, and they were otherwise very rich ; but the castle itself, having been long uninhabited, was in a sad state of dilapidation. By degrees they repaired and improved it, the first of architects being employed for that purpose, till it became the stately place you see,—as full of artistic beauty as it is of comfort and convenience. By all true judges of natural beauty its situation is considered to be incomparable, placed as it is upon the border of a chain of lakes which rival those of Killarney, with a variety of forest, moorland and mountain scenery close at hand, and, as you know, with the glory of the great Atlantic Ocean at its foot, and beyond, north and south, a coast of wonderful picturesqueness, and wild, stern beauty.

“To the rearing and nurture of this unhappy child they devoted their days. They hired the best of attendants to wait upon him ; and, by paying them highly, and securing their fidelity by oath, they kept the sorrowful secret of what lived within their walls.

“These dear ladies were well repaid for the devotion of their lives. To the astonishment of his family and the physicians who knew his case, this poor Lord Richard—for so he was ever called—gave proof, as time wore on, of the highest capacity and intelligence. He acquired languages with surprising facility ; and, though he could not speak them—his articulation being so defective—he read and wrote in various tongues with ease and pleasure. He had but one arm and hand, yet he wrote with the ease of a scholar and a gentleman a most refined hand. In history, politics, mathematics, and in general science especially, his knowledge, as time wore on, became profound. In music he took supreme delight, and in all manner and kinds of art. He

acquired much knowledge of paintings and engravings, and was always greatly pleased when a rare or fine picture or piece of sculpture was purchased and brought to Castle Morr. For all these studies and acquirements he had masters, the best which could be obtained ; and, highly paid and liberally treated, they were always sorry when all that they could teach had been imparted, and their services were no longer required.

“ For some years this poor Lord Richard’s health was as good as might be expected from one who could never rise from the couch on which he lay, or ever change the scene by which he was surrounded. But, as time wore on, his chronic ailments became such as to necessitate the constant presence of a physician. For some years this office was filled by an Italian of great skill ; but Dr. Fontana at last grew tired of the intense solitude of Morr, and wishing to share in the social and political regeneration of his country, returned thither. Then it was that Dr. Granville, the eminent London physician, being consulted, recommended his friend Dr. Marlow. No one was better fitted to fill this vacant post, as he was a gentleman by birth, highly educated and accomplished, and, from study and extensive travel, well acquainted with all manner and kinds of art. For quite ten years he has resided here, the most honoured and trusted of friends and companions ; and he will yet remain, for he promised this poor lord never to leave the Ladies Clare while they live. Nor shall I ; and my services have been ten years longer than those of Dr. Marlow. Prior to my engagement here, I had been governess and companion to a family of high rank, and had thus travelled extensively, and mingled much in society. At first I greatly felt the weary monotony of my secluded life at Castle Morr ; but the noble goodness of poor Lord Richard’s disposition, his sweetness of temper, his humility, patience, and gratitude

for the smallest service rendered, won my respect and attachment; and the pleasure and comfort my musical skill—on the organ especially—afforded him, induced me to stay on. Thus at length feelings of high respect and attachment were bound up with my duties, and separation became impossible.

“As I contributed in one direction to make life bearable to this poor suffering gentleman, so did Dr. Marlow in another—that of art. Occasionally he travelled on the Continent in search of pictures and other objects of *vertu*; more frequently he visited London for the same purpose; and during the season he held a commission to buy whatever seemed desirable,—more especially if the artist, still young, showed signs of promise, and might thus be struggling through the first difficulties of a doubtful and precarious profession. To all such Dr. Marlow was desired by Lord Richard to be most liberal. For though generous, even to a fault, and practically unacquainted with the world, the poor gentleman had much common sense, and this he strengthened by reading and meditation. He therefore knew that, in the majority of cases, almsgiving in an easy manner effects the greatest social wrong. Thus few societies or benevolent funds benefited by his money; but poor students, struggling authors, artists of all classes, and musicians did. For Dr. Marlow, going much into society, heard many social *on dits* of a touching character: such as, this poor fellow was painting a picture under the greatest difficulty, and would probably have it seized for rent before it was finished, or that poor author had been ill paid for his noble book. In cases such as these, the artist, the author, the struggling student, received a cheque from an unknown friend. Their distress was thus relieved without humiliation or the loss of self-respect.

“Commissioned in this manner to aid struggling merit, and always on the look-out for opportunities of so doing,

Dr. Marlow, one January evening, being in town on some business of the Ladies Clare, and on the way to his club to dine, happened as he passed by to glance in at a picture-dealer's window in a West-End street. His eye was at once arrested by the beauty of colouring and exquisite interpretation of nature of a small landscape painted in oil. It represented a weir or fishing-place on a wide stream ; an island much shadowed by trees being to the left, and the shallowness of a ford, charmingly rendered, to the right. Dr. Marlow entered the shop, and inquired of the dealer its price, what it was named, and who painted it. A sum was asked, of which, as the Doctor rightly suspected, not more than a fourth part would reach the artist's hand, and it was called 'A View on the Severn,' or 'Hildridge's Weir.' To this the dealer added, 'It is the work of a very young woman,—or lady as I ought to say, for her manners are most refined, and she is very good-looking. Young as she is, she is dressed in deep mourning, though not in weeds ; so I cannot say if she is a widow or not. Beyond this I know nothing, as she declines to give me her name or address, though I fancy she lives in London. She paints figures as admirably as she does landscapes, and in water colours as well as oils ; though her best work—and it is really surprising work—is in sculpture. See here, sir !' And the dealer, stepping to a screened recess, brought forth a small group in marble. 'But marble,' he continued, 'doesn't go off like painted canvas. So here it has been a long while, and is likely to remain.' Dr. Marlow bought both the picture and the marble group ; and asked the dealer when he was likely to see the lady again. 'I don't know, sir,' was the reply ; 'it's quite uncertain. It may be to-morrow, or it may be weeks hence, or not at all.'

"In spite of this answer, Dr. Marlow kept a good look-out on the dealer's shop ; and not more than a week after, upon reaching it, and looking within before he entered, he saw the

figure of a lady standing by the counter. She had just unwrapped a small picture from a paper covering, and was evidently talking in relation to it with the dealer. Its price was probably the question, for the dealer again and again shook his head. Anxious to see the young lady's face if he could, Dr. Marlow kept watch, and, as it proved, too long ; for, just as he was about to enter the shop and stay further bargaining by making the picture his own, the lady gave way, as it seemed, to the dealer's proposal, and, moving the picture towards him, gently nodded an assent. Readily—for he must have been conscious he had made a cruel and usurious bargain—the crafty shopkeeper took a few coins from his pocket, and threw them down on the counter. They were hurriedly taken up, for necessity had prompted her assent ; and wishing, as it seemed, to avoid further parley, the young lady turned round and hastened to the door which she was about to open as Dr. Marlow entered. He had thus a perfect view of her beautiful and earnest, though sorrow-stricken face, and which, moreover, was pallid from confinement to the house, or from indisposition. Desirous of speaking to her, he respectfully stayed her exit from the shop ; but, declining to answer his earnest words, and wishing without doubt to remain unknown, she merely drew aside, and as he moved forward from the door, she as quickly moved towards it, and made her exit without a word. Thus baffled in what were his generous intentions, Dr. Marlow could only buy the picture and regret his failure.

"This was late in December, and——"

"I remember the night well," interrupted Arthur. "It was our holidays, and we were all three staying with Mrs. Hexham."

"The next day," continued Miss Haller, "Dr. Marlow was necessitated to return to Ireland ; but, prior to leaving London, he commissioned the dealer to buy whatever works

of art the lady might take to him, and this at a generous price. This the dealer promised to do.

“ Upon reaching Castle Morr, and exhibiting his purchases to poor Lord Richard, Dr. Marlow gave the greatest delight. More pictures of the same kind and quality were eagerly desired ; and when in February some legal business of importance necessitated another journey to London, Lord Richard besought his physician to spare no pains in seeking out the lady who could paint so well, and who could, moreover, excel in a way so masterly in sculpture. For, deprived by the nature of his hideous deformity of all power of seeing for himself the splendid scenery of his immediate neighbourhood, as also that lying farther away, Lord Donore had long wished for some powerful and original hand to depict it for him, and this with a fulness and perfection which residence and familiarity through various seasons could alone impart.

“ But upon reaching London and visiting the dealer, Dr. Marlow could hear nothing of the lady. As though scared away from the shop by his own presumption in addressing her, she had never visited it again. All inquiries were in vain ; and at the end of ten days, his business being accomplished, he was about to return to Ireland, when it suddenly occurred to him that the only place he had left unvisited was the National Gallery on students’ days. There, possibly, he might find the unknown painter. Without delay he hastened thither, but so late in the afternoon as just to see the students departing. To his chagrin, he encountered the lady as she stepped down from the portico and he ascended the steps ; and though he again stayed and addressed her in the most respectful manner, she resolutely avoided him, and, passing down and mingling with the crowd, was in a minute lost to sight.

“ Thus assured that she was still in London, Dr. Marlow’s

hopes revived. Early in April he was there again, and then he heard from the dealer to whose shop he had at once gone, that the lady was possibly ill, as two days previously she had sent a small painting for sale by the hands of an Irish servant. The latter was proof, however, to all interrogations ; but, upon leaving, the man had followed her at a distance, and thus learnt that the lady lodged in a small but respectable street leading from Queen Square, Bloomsbury. A ticket in a window showed that there were vacant rooms in the house ; and under pretence of wanting such, the dealer secured an entrance, and, in the course of a very short time, had learnt from the slatternly, garrulous mistress that the artist's name was Hexham, that she had been widowed after the briefest possible married life, and that she came from a well-known provincial town bordering on Wales. More Mrs. Gunn did not know. She added that, when well, the lady worked very hard, but for the few past days she had been sickening of some complaint, and, feeling very ill, had kept her bed. Mrs. Gunn proposed sending for a doctor ; but the lady, saying she was very poor, would not permit it. This was the substance of what the dealer learnt.

"Immediately upon hearing this, Dr. Marlow hastened to the house of his friend Dr. Granville. Placing all the circumstances before him, he begged him to go at once to the artist's address, see her, and simply saying that he was commissioned by an admirer and purchaser of her paintings to attend her free of cost, provide a nurse and all else that was requisite. Pleased to oblige, Dr. Granville went as soon as possible. He found the lady dangerously ill with typhus fever, and quite unconscious. In this extremity a surgeon had been sent for ; but, fearing he should not be paid—for he had already lost money by several of Mrs. Gunn's lodgers—he was remiss in his attendance. Thus, without sufficient medical aid or proper and skilful nursing--her only atten-

dant being the kind and tender, but overworked, servant of the house—the lady must have died. But Dr. Granville at once summoned a most skilful surgeon and trained nurse to his aid, and paying Mrs. Gunn handsomely for all necessary help, the poor lady was soon under proper treatment; and though for some days she lay at the point of death, the fell disease took presently a favourable turn, and from this date recovery commenced, and went onwards. Visiting her from day to day, and finding her to be a truly noble and gifted woman, Dr. Granville became greatly interested in his patient and her fortunes, and conferred much with Dr. Marlow thereon.

“It happened in the previous year, that Dr. Marlow had lost a favourite and only brother. This gentleman, who had held for many years a high civil appointment in India, died suddenly from the effects of the climate, leaving three orphan children, whose mother had then been dead two years. So soon as he heard of his brother's death, Dr. Marlow sent for the children; and in due time they came to England attended by a native servant. While considering how he could act best for their benefit—whether place them at school in England, or have them in Ireland under the care of a tutor and governess—his knowledge of Mrs. Hexham and her high qualifications commenced; and thus, while her convalescence was in progress, it occurred both to him and Dr. Granville that, could she be induced to go to Ireland, she might fill the office of superintendent, if not of governess, to the children, as also artist to Lord Donore. But it was soon found that to gain her assent to such a proposal would require some skill; for she possessed a proud and independent spirit, and objected to leave her employments in London—more particularly those connected with her duties in the *atelier* of a well-known sculptor. Personally Dr. Marlow kept in the background;

and thus it was only through Dr. Granville he learnt that there were three children in whom she was much interested, these being the grandnieces and grandnephew of her late husband. To aid in keeping them at school she had worked sedulously for two years ; and she was otherwise most tenderly attached to them. Learning all this by degrees, and keeping in view her shy and reticent character, the two doctors framed an advertisement, and had it inserted in the chief daily newspaper. It was to the effect that a governess was wanted in the west of Ireland for three children. A widow lady would be preferred, and if she had children they could accompany her. A good salary was offered, and to this was added the striking words, 'The place is lonely in the extreme.' Letters in reply were to be sent to a West-end bookseller. Many were received, but of course none were replied to, for so soon as the advertisement was in print, Dr. Granville laid it before Mrs. Hexham, and saying he knew the advertiser, strongly urged her to accept the situation. 'A year, if no more,' he said, 'in the fine climate, and amid the varied and beautiful scenery of western Ireland, would permanently re-establish your health,' which was seriously broken ; and the power of taking with her the children to whom she was attached was another inducement for acceptance, as was also the good salary offered. 'She could likewise,' he added—and this was the masterstroke of all—'pursue both painting and sculpture ; for those by whom she would be surrounded were true lovers of the beautiful, and new subjects in infinite variety would lie ready to her pencil and brush, if not to her modelling tool and chisel.' Thus urged, and led by the necessity of change, and the love of those she so tenderly calls her 'children,' she accepted the proposal, and, so soon as she was convalescent, came away to Ireland."

"It was a happy day, Miss Haller, said Arthur : "the

girls and I well remember the bright May morning on which we started from the Euston station, and journeyed on our happy way."

"It was a happy day, too, for poor Lord Donore," continued Miss Haller, "and added, we all think, to the length of his life; for, in spite of all the ameliorative agents great wealth brought around him, his lot was sad and painful in the extreme,—in truth, one long-continued weariness, from disease and monotony. For some months before Mrs. Hexham came he was very ill; but her advent and your own gave him, as it seemed, a new existence. Everything you said and did was reported to him; and your daily life at the Grange was almost as much a reality to him as to yourselves. Though secretly removed, and but for the briefest interval, every picture and piece in marble which Mrs. Hexham had brought with her was taken for his inspection to the castle; and when pretty Lufra returned with the other dogs, one day Dr. Marlow had visited the Grange, and made herself at home with Doric, Lord Donore begged that she might be brought again,—for his love for and interest in dumb creatures was intense. So Lufy at length took up her residence altogether at the castle, and became, as you know, at different times the mother of two litters of the loveliest pups—some like herself, pretty creatures, and some like Doric, who is so handsome. Then Bob, the cat, early ensconced himself in my Lord's chamber—creeping in furtively at first, through the balcony, but, fed and greatly petted, presently remained for good and all. Yet all the pleasure these creatures gave him was crowned by the visits of the magpie. This bird's boldness, impudence, and perpetual trickery infinitely amused him; although the Ladies Clare were so often annoyed by the mysterious loss of their jewellery, spectacles, pens, scissors, and other things,—yet always found, hidden in the strangest

places. Trick was also always stealing my Lord's pocket-handkerchiefs, and whatever else was portable about his couch,—his letters, his watch, or the spoons with which his medicine was administered.

“All these things gave pleasure ; yet none so great as the island and the island-house. As you all observed, soon after you came to Morr a noble balcony was built around a large window, with mirrors on either side ; these reflected as well as magnified all your charming labours in connexion with the house, the garden, and little farm, for by the slightest movement of his couch most parts of the lake and island were visible to him. Day by day and hour by hour he watched your labours, and often heard your pleasant chatter as you worked or played ; and such was music to his ear. All your work in connexion with tile-painting was known to him ; for in your absence every tile, as also most other portable things, were carried across the lake for his inspection. Your games were painted by Mrs. Hexham ; and, as you all well know, few events occurred but what afforded subjects for her ready pencil. Thus the poor gentleman lived with you, as it were, entered into your joys, felt for you in your childish troubles, excused your shortcomings, and was ever your generous friend. He was also a most generous friend to Mrs. Hexham—who, by the reluctant permission of the Ladies Clare, came to know him well. This was an extreme favour, which never would have been granted but for the reason that many members of Lord Donore's family wished for a memorial that, veiling his hideous deformities, might yet preserve those portions of his face and head which were so beautiful. His character is enshrined in their hearts, as in the hearts of many others ; for in its unselfishness and purity it was almost divine. Full of all sorts of nobleness, though a martyr to continued pain, he was ever thinking how best to make life worthy

and how best to serve the society of man, of which he felt he formed a part, though cut off from all commingling with it by physical misfortunes which were tragic in their kind and degree.

"A few months ago his health again grew worse, and he was very ill all through the autumn and when winter set in. Even music ceased to be a joy, and he longed for rest. Dying when the great storm began, he was sufficiently aroused by it to take the greatest interest in the safety of those at the Grange ; and when the terrible sea broke through the bar into the lakes, his agony of spirit was intense. When every attempt at rescue failed, when the great columns of water stalked in like mighty and all-devouring leviathans from the sea, and bore down upon the towers with shock after shock, it suddenly occurred to him that Nero might save Arthur. The great dog lay by his couch as the thought flashed through his mind. Making a sign to it, it rose, as was its custom, and laid its great head on its master's hand. In a striking manner for one usually so unintelligible, Lord Donore gave his command to the dog to save the boy. Then signifying to his valet to go down and give it freedom on the lawn, he watched the result with passionate intensity. Understanding with almost human intelligence what had been said to it, the great creature forced its way through the throng gathered on the terrace, and dashing into the furious sea, strove to breast the waves. As it neared the tower it was again and again repulsed, and only as the upper storey fell did it succeed in springing on to such portion as yet stood, and in clutching Arthur by the sleeve of his coat. Then, dashing with its burden back into the waves, it swam towards the terrace, which it might not have reached but that several men, conspicuously among whom were Tarra the potter and old Mike, rushed into the water and at the risk of their lives brought both to land. Both seemed dead

or nearly so. Arthur was carried to the house ; but the dog was past aid of any kind, for, severely injured by the falling stones of the tower, it, so soon as it lay stretched upon dry ground, gave a few convulsive movements and then died. Thus to the end the great dog was obedient to the will of its master ; and if in the supposed cause of that master its brute instincts led it to do cruel wrong, in atonement it gave its life. The excitement of this terrible night over, Lord Donore sank rapidly into a state of insensibility, and in a few days died—to the great relief of all those who had so long witnessed his weary and painful nights and days.

“ Thus, children, all mystery is at an end. In reality there was none,—nothing more than a poor sick gentleman lying in a lonely room. But it was not thought well for children to see his hideousness, or what debasement in a physical sense the human form is capable of ; but rather that they should hear of him one day as their truest friend, and the participator, though unseen and unknown, in their simple joys and sorrows. Passed away, and his poor resemblance veiled in marble, all you see may be admired ; and all you learn now, or at any future time, of his truly noble character—his learning, his unselfishness, his aspirations for the moral and social advance of human kind—may teach you the pregnant lesson that, however circumstanced we may be, or however shrouded under the darker aspects of human fate, we can live worthily and do good to others, if so we will.

“ That this secret relative to Lord Donore piqued the curiosity of all of you, we well knew. That the sorrowful fact was made a secret at all, both Dr. Marlow and I always deplored—for we were well aware that curiosity is innate in children, and that to unwisely baffle it begets dissimulation. We would have rather trusted to your sense of honour. But the Ladies Clare, wisely or not, had made Lord Donore's existence a mystery from the beginning, in order to shield him

as they thought from painful humiliation. Every servant, on being hired, was bound to secrecy, and paid highly on that account ; and every attendant and friend had to promise fidelity. In the forty-four years the ladies have lived at Morr, only twice has the secret been divulged, and then respectively by two servants who had been dismissed for disobedience and incompetency. Thus arose the tales current in Islandmore and the country of 'the little man.'

"To this hour, Arthur, the Ladies Clare do not know of your intrusion into the poor gentleman's chamber—and they now never will. Lord Donore made Dr. Marlow and me give our earnest promise to that effect. The shock, however, consequent on your sudden appearance made him for a time very ill ; but his noble nature suffered him to harbour no resentment. On the contrary, he rather admired the pertinacity with which you followed up the mystery, and, though so often baffled, made the solution your own at last ; and, what is more, you even condoned your sin of trespass by the rigid faith with which you kept the secret when thus it became known to you."

"To the end of my days, Miss Haller," replied Arthur, in a tremulous voice expressive of pain and earnest regret, "I shall remember with shame my cruel intrusion into that room of sorrow. I felt humiliated the moment I saw the poor hideous figure stretched on the couch before me, and I would have given almost life itself not to have been the perpetrator of so great and mean a wrong. But my curiosity was piqued, and overmastered my sense of right. One thing I may say in palliation of my sin,—I have never spoken of what I saw, and never shall."

"Quite right. Lord Donore inquired as to this ; and our assurance of your reticence won you back to favour. He also learnt from Mrs. Hexham that some sketch necessary for her modelling had fallen into Freda's hands. That thus

she knew the secret too, and that her silence was as unbroken as your own, Dr. Marlow, Mrs. Hexham and I have each of us made silent observation, and honour you both accordingly ; because we know that those who reverence their conscience in their youth will do the same in the graver concerns of middle and later life.

“ Having made this explanation, at the request of Mrs. Hexham and Dr. Marlow, I must now leave you, as I have to dine at seven o'clock with the Ladies Clare. If you go into the west dining-room, you will, I think, find Forbes waiting tea ; and after it you may go in and sit a short time with Mrs. Hexham, who is, we all think, better this afternoon.”

For many days after the great storm Mrs. Hexham lay dangerously ill : for a portion of the time her life was despaired of. She had only just now left her bedroom for a few hours at a time, to lie on a couch in one adjacent. During the worst stage of her severe illness, Mrs. Graham, long one of the resident nurses, had, under Dr. Marlow's care, watched her untiringly—for the death of Lord Donore had freed her from her customary duties—but now Mrs. Hexham's convalescence grew from day to day, she gave more of her time to the Ladies Clare, and to the seaman with the broken thigh, who, though with assistance he could now move from his bed to a chair by the fire, could not leave the room. His companion—old Denis's son—had already left the castle ; not without kindly help from the Ladies Clare, who had highly valued his father's long and faithful services, and buried him at their cost.

But, with or without the professional nurse's presence, pretty Irish Mary showed the most devoted love. Night and day alike she would not without reluctance leave her mistress ; and when at last persuaded by Forbes or Dina, or commanded by Dr. Marlow, to take a few hours' rest, it was always under protest : “ Shure, she'll be wanting something

me hand can only giv' her ; or her pillows will be nadin' settlin', or she'll be wantin' me some way ! If she does, you'll be calling me, won't you ?" Speaking thus, she would go, but only for a little while.

Thus devoting herself to all those duties which ensured Mrs. Hexham's recovery, Mary had been but twice—and then only for a few minutes each time—to see her old parents in their temporary home in the rooms above the great coach-house. She knew that they were well and well cared for, and that her father and Pat were busy helping with the new cabin which bricklayers and masons from Islandmore, under the supervision of the agent of the Ladies Clare, were building in an improved manner on a better and more elevated site. Thus, when her mother sent tender messages saying she wished to see her Mary, the only reply was, " Me love to her, the tinder mother ! Shure, won't I be goin' to her when me misthress gets strength !—but, sorra is it, she needs me till thin."

When the children had taken tea, and bright lights burned in every room, hall and corridor throughout the great castle, they went to pay Mrs. Hexham a visit, as had now been their habit for the few past evenings. Her room led from an upstairs gallery, and, magnificently furnished, was decorated with the richest works of art. Here, covered up, she lay on a wide couch beside the glowing fire, while in front, on a large soft rug, was the prettiest imaginable group of animal life. For Lufy lay there, with a lovely family some three weeks old, while papa Doric, with his black muzzle, his long ears tipped with black, and his silvery-gray head, sat gazing very stoically into the fire, as though not caring to be troubled with family affairs. Tucked up beside him was Bob, much sleeker than when he left London long before—as was but natural when he had rich cream to lap instead of sky-blue milk, and delicate tid-bits of various kinds. Another, too, of the children's friend

was there ; for though the Ladies Clare loved the creatures so for the sake of him to whom each one had been a joy, they spared them now a little while each evening to her who also loved them. Thus Trick was there ; and very wicked, yet solemn, he looked. He sat perched on the edge of a small tray ; and having just stolen a piece of toast from the rack, and hidden it away in the folds of some drapery in a distant part of the room, he winked and dozed in a self-satisfied manner most comical to see.

Approaching Mrs. Hexham's couch with gentle footsteps, the children all kissed her very tenderly, and little Kathie, as the youngest, nestled softly to her cheek. They soon began to talk.

"Mamma," said Freda presently, "Miss Haller has told us, as you wished her to do, all about Lord Donore. There is neither secret nor mystery now."

"I am glad of this," was the reply ; "and in reverence to the dead we will still keep silence, because there are many things of earth that silence best consecrates. This is one. But we must ever remember the poor gentleman with respectful love, because in life he was a most generous and thoughtful friend ; and in death also, for we are, each one of us, benefited by his will. But not for this—not for money, or any of the advantages money brings—but for the example of his noble life under circumstances the most cruel and unfortunate."

Mrs. Hexham then went on to tell the elder children—for Lucy and Kathie and Harold had already seated themselves on the hearthrug, and had neither eye nor ear for anything but papa Doric and mamma Lufra and their exquisite little family—of the result of several negotiations which had been pending during the past fortnight, and of which they already knew a good deal. These were to the effect that Arthur, at the close of the next term at Eton, was to be articled to an

a architect of great fame who resided in London ; that Walter was to return to school, and Harold to accompany him ; and that Freda and Iole would also go to London to school to an English lady, a friend of Miss Haller, and under whose superior care they would have good moral training and high-class education. Kathie and Lucy were as yet to remain at Morr with Mrs. Hexham. They were all very pleased at these arrangements, although they would regret leaving their beautiful Irish home. But then there would be holidays, when they would return to joys intensified by absence and yearning love.

The island and the island-house were spoken of. The former was so covered by sand, mud, fragments of rock, and driftwood, that nothing could be done till the gang of men then at work in repairing the great breach made by the sea in the upland bar had finished their job, and could transfer their labour to it. This they would be able probably to do as spring advanced ; and in the autumn fresh planting of shrubs and laying of turf would take place, under the supervision of the agent at Islandmore. Generally speaking, the splendid trees which decked the isle had been but little damaged, so that it might be hoped that in a year or two the island and the island-house would be as they had been when the great storm bore down upon them. So far as the exterior went, only the towers and staircases were damaged ; although the interior and its decorations and contents had suffered much from the force of the sea-water and mingled sand and mud. But, as Arthur well said, he "would soon set all to rights when a few months' fine weather had dried the walls, and he and Walter had a holiday together."

The Grange had suffered far more serious damage ; and the agent considered that much of it, if not all, would have to be rebuilt, for the sea-water had undermined part of the foundations. Fortunately, the water had not reached the

upper floor, and thus all Mrs. Hexham's works of art had been preserved uninjured, and were already removed in safety to the castle ; but months must go by—nay, perhaps a year or two—before a new house could be finished, and a sea-wall erected beyond the lawn. Meanwhile, Mrs. Hexham, the children, and servants, were to remain at the castle, as the welcome guests of the Ladies Clare. The former expressed regret at the necessity of this arrangement, although she was silent as to the reason why.

Just then Mrs. Graham came in to say her patient must talk no more, as the time allotted by Dr. Marlow for the children's visit had been already far exceeded, although they might remain awhile longer provided they otherwise amused themselves. She then gave Mrs. Hexham some medicine, and, addressing her in an undertone, rang for Mary. The latter, who with Dina was preparing her mistress's chamber for the night, presently came in.

"Mary," said the nurse decisively, and looking at Mrs. Hexham as she spoke, "your mother wants to see you, and you had better go at once."

"Shure, Misthress Graham," was the reply, "the morrow will do. It is very kind of you wishing me to see the dear ould father and the dear ould mother, and me little Pat ; but they'll be axin' me to eat and drink and talk, and me lady will be nadin' me the while."

"Nonsense ! Dina and I can wait on Mrs. Hexham for an hour or two."

"Thank you, Misthress Graham. It's kind of you ; but I'd rather not be goin'."

"Mary," interposed Mrs. Hexham, "you must really go. I can spare you for the rest of the evening. Mrs. Graham and Dina can assist me to bed. They know my ways as well as you do."

Mary obstinately shook her head.

"I'd obey you, me lady, was not the goin' against me heart. What hand can be settlin' yer pillows as mine?"

"The truth is," said Graham, with a gravity which had its weight, "you are wanted upstairs. Some one is there—has been there now for just a month—who knows you well."

"Me!" And the girl, turning very pale, clasped her hands and came forward a step or two.

"Yes," continued the nurse, "who knows you well. We should have broken this out to you some days ago, but we feared your cries and hysterics; for when you recognise old friends, Mary, you're apt, they tell me, to make a scene of it, and this my patient in the stable yard, no more than Mrs. Hexham, could bear. Will you promise me to be quiet?"

The girl made no reply, but gazed upon the nurse with doubtful wonder.

"Well," continued Graham, "as you seem not to comprehend my meaning, I will show you a token which may help your memory. Do you know this?" And as she spoke, she took from her pocket a fold of paper, and drew from it the half of a broken sixpence, and through which, a hole having been drilled, ran a piece of well-worn tarred string.

"Me William!" exclaimed the girl, with deep emotion. "Me William!—and he so thrue to me!" She covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears. Gentle tears they were after the first passionate outburst, for she recollected her tender mistress's feeble state.

"You have the fellow-piece, I think," said Graham.

The girl unfastened her gown, and from about her beautiful throat brought the fellow-half of the sixpence, which, from the day she had plighted her troth, and through ill fortune and good fortune, she had worn there.

"Yes," continued Graham; "it is your William—William Esmond. In the delirium of his fever he often called you by your name, asking you to come to him after he had been

so long away. But Mary is a common name, and we paid little heed to the matter. However, when the fever had abated and his senses had returned, he heard the tones of your voice from your mother's room one evening when you had hurried there, and he questioned me next day. But I could give him no information, for I knew nothing of your history. My curiosity, however, was aroused, and I spoke to your mother ; and then I learnt that William was the Christian name of the English seaman to whom, while in Dublin as a servant, you had engaged yourself. Yet, such was William's critical state, that we did not think it right to tell him for a time. His life hung on a thread, even when the fever was gone ; and Dr. Marlow forbid excitement of any kind. But his convalescence being now advanced, and his strength returning, we have made known to him his happy fortune—that his faithful Mary is near at hand, and that her kind old mother has helped to nurse him tenderly. Thus he is impatient to see you, and you must come with me. But no cries—no weeping !”

The girl stepped gently to her mistress, and, stooping, said, —“With your leave, me lady, I'll go to me William a little while.”

“Do ; and come back to me very happy by-and-by, as you deserve to be.”

So Mary went ; and the children reluctantly withdrew to their own room, for they wished to hear the dénouement of this pleasant story ; but Mrs. Hexham said there was a morrow, and for that they must wait.

Two hours after, as she lay still in her hushed and shadowed room, the girl stole in, and towards the bed.

“I am not asleep, Mary,” the former said, “but wait to hear about your William.”

“Yes, it's me William,” Mary gently said, “me thrue and faithful William ; and all tinderness and kindness, as he ever

was. He's axed me to marry him, me lady. But he'll go another voyage first, and so I'll be remaining with you till——"

"Till what, Mary?"

"Till you're happy yerself, me lady. The Misthress Forbes, and the Misthress Graham, and Dina, and the rist of us, have our eyes and our ears, and know——"

"Hush, Mary, you are very good, but you must not speak in riddles. Just settle my pillows and mend the fire, and we will talk over your projects to-morrow."

Ten days after this eventful night, Dr. Marlow, accompanied by Miss Haller, the two eldest girls, and the three boys, set out on their way to England. Some especial business called the lady there; and, such being the case, it was thought best for Freda and Iole to accompany her, and be introduced by her to their new home. Mrs. Hexham, now gathering strength from day to day, was to sit with the Ladies Clare, read to them, write their letters, and be otherwise their companion.

Miss Haller and Dr. Marlow had not been gone more than a week, when one evening, very late, a telegram for Mrs. Hexham was brought from Islandmore. It summoned her to her mother, who was very ill and might not survive many days. Late as was the hour—for the Ladies Clare were retiring to rest—she sought them and stated the matter.

"I am very desirous to go," she said; "and as soon as may be, if you will forgive me for deserting my post so soon. But the circumstances are peculiar: my poor old mother, though sane enough on many points, has been afflicted with occasional mania for many years; one of its manifestations being an intense hatred of some of her children. I have been among the number, though I contributed to her support till she gained her present position. She has now been

for four or five years an inmate of Heston Hospital, one of the noblest Charities in the Midland counties for aged widowed and unmarried ladies. I would rather have continued my contribution to her support, but others failed to pay their share—this just as her peculiarities made residence with her for any time beyond a few days an impossibility ; so at length, as these peculiarities increased with age, even intercourse of any kind had to cease. Thus I have neither seen nor heard of her for full five years, though I occasionally hear of her well-being from my kind friend Miss M'Leod, the matron. Thus, ladies, I should like to go to her, if only to see if her cruel mood has softened towards me—for I feel she is still my mother."

"Go ! dear Mrs. Hexham," said Lady Mary tenderly ; "we only know too well the heavy shadows which fall on human lives. Very curious to say, our family helped to found this Charity ; and some few years ago our dear Donore invested three thousand pounds in behalf of it, for the purpose of augmenting the yearly allowance of coal to its aged ladies, so that you will, as it were, be still encompassed by his thoughtful care. Go, we both say ; only we fear your strength for such a journey."

"With care I think I shall get through it, though it is a long one."

"You shall have every care," continued Lady Mary ; "for Saunderson shall accompany you to the town nearest to where your mother lives, and await your return there, if you please ; for return you must to us, as soon as your mission is accomplished. So much have you increased the happiness of all those at Castle Morr that we cannot spare you. With respect to Haller and Dr. Marlow, it may be best not to inform them of your absence just yet, for one or both would be at once returning home. In this case, Dr. Marlow would leave most important business unfinished, and Haller, who

has so long needed a change, would have no holiday. Lady Isabel and I can do very well for a few days. We shall have Lucy and Kathie and the pets to amuse us with, and the care of our faithful and long-tried servants."

Thus, in the cold grey light of the following morning, in a close carriage with Saunderson in the rumble behind, and warmly clad, the lady, even yet an invalid, began her journey to that far away hospital beside the Wrekin.

Three days later, another telegram for Mrs. Hexham was brought to Morr.

Its arrival created the greatest surprise, for it was just possible she had not reached her destination, and this was another summons to her mother's dying bed. Forbes was consulted, and she thought the telegram ought to be opened, which it accordingly was. It was a curious one; and, dated from the town where Mrs. Hexham had passed her youth, was to this effect:—

"Mr. Palin of Swan Hill, solicitor, wishes to see Mrs. Hexham as soon as she can possibly make the journey. Events of very great importance to her interests and those of the Betton children have occurred. Tom Hughes was killed a month ago in a drunken brawl; and old Thomas Hexham was found dead in his bed last week, and was buried the day before yesterday."

The Ladies Clare, though they knew that Mrs. Hexham was bound to Heston Hospital, had, from age and indisposition, a very hazy notion of her address; and Forbes was not more enlightened. In addition to this, the ladies in their tenderness considered that the errand on which Mrs. Hexham had hurried away while her state of health was still so delicate, was in itself sufficiently anxious, without adding to it another trial perhaps still heavier. They therefore hesitated as to what it might be best to do. At length, after much consideration, they

resolved to repeat the message to Dr. Marlow, and add thereto some further words. On this errand a servant was at once despatched to Islandmore, and the added words were these :—" The telegram thus repeated arrived here this morning for Mrs. Hexham. She is away : was summoned three days ago to the deathbed of her mother at Heston Hospital. Do in the matter what you think judicious ; but spare her pain, and let her return as soon as may be to her Irish home. All is well here, so that Miss Haller need not abridge her hard-earned holiday. Saunderson accompanied Mrs. Hexham as far as Stafford. He has orders to go to London to Dr. Marlow, and there await his pleasure. He has leave to take Birmingham for a day or two on his route, in order to see a brother."

Dr. Marlow and Miss Haller had taken apartments in one of those luxurious hotels which adorn western London ; and, having that day seen the children to their respective destinations—the boys to Eton, the girls to Kensington—were just sitting down to dinner, when the above telegram was brought in. It filled both with the utmost amazement, and the question followed, " What could be done ? "

" Were it merely the question of the sickness or death of Mrs. Hexham's mother, I would ask you to go at once to Heston Hospital," said the Doctor to Miss Haller ; " but, as there is legal business in the case, I had, if possible, better go. Though how I am to put off the Stock Exchange business of to-morrow, and another important affair in one of the Chancery courts, I scarcely know."

" If Saunderson should come to-night," suggested Miss Haller, " could he act for you ? "

" No ! a servant, however faithful and confidential he may be, would not do. If I go, I can see the solicitor, or, if not him, at least Mrs. Hexham. Now let us hasten dinner. After it I will drive to the private residence of one of the

Ladies Clare's solicitors, and see if to-morrow's business can be deferred for a few days."

The Doctor fortunately found it could ; and therefore, at nine o'clock that night, he started from Euston by the mail train. It was yet early when he reached the beautiful old border town ; but the morning was fine, and, when he had breakfasted at the chief inn, he went out to look about him, —at the ancient timbered houses, the Elizabethan market-house, the bridges which span the famous river, and the red sandstone abbey of the days of the great Norman baron-Roger Montgomery.

The clocks were striking eleven as he ascended the rough-paved, narrow, winding street known as Swan Hill, along which many garden walls, spacious courtyards, and over-arching though as yet leafless trees, gave it a secluded and academic air. In the most spacious of these courtyards was Mr. Palin's offices and house. Seeking admittance at the latter, a servant ushered him into a morning room, so furnished and filled with works of art, books, and plants, as to give evidence at once that the country solicitor was a man of superior education, refinement, and wealth.

"Mr. Palin is in his office at this hour," said the servant.

"My visit is one on urgent business," was the reply : "give him this card."

The servant departed, and Mr. Palin soon came in. He was a man past middle life, with a keen yet kindly countenance, and greeted Dr. Marlow with much courtesy.

"I just know your name," he said ; "for in the few letters I have had from Mrs. Hexham since her residence in Ireland she has once or twice mentioned it as that of the physician to the Ladies Clare who generously relieved her of much of her labour in teaching ; so I presume it is upon her business you have come."

"Precisely so. She is only now recovering—in fact, is not

yet convalescent—from a dangerous illness brought on by cold and exposure on the night of the great storm which just after Christmas swept over the western coast of Ireland. It was, therefore, with much consternation that Miss Haller—the confidential friend of the Ladies Clare—and I, being on business together in London, heard last night of her summons to her mother's deathbed ; and, imprudent as the step was, of her obeying it. Following on this came your telegram, which being opened at Castle Morr, the Ladies Clare not knowing correctly Mrs. Hexham's address, sent it on to me ; and thus I am here to see if I can be of service to her interests—for, as the aged ladies kindly considered, she has anxiety enough just now to contend with, without a fresh instalment."

"She is at Heston, then ?" asked the solicitor with some surprise. "It is only this morning that I heard of her mother's death, and that the funeral takes place this afternoon."

"Indeed ! Then I can be of no service ?"

"That depends on circumstances," replied the solicitor, with a shrewd look : "but, as I perceive you are interested in Mrs. Hexham and her affairs, I will just say that the business is of a very interesting and hopeful character ; for, if all goes well, she will come in for what is her right, and the Betton children also. You, of course, know her history ?"

"Not a word of it."

"Not even her maiden name ?"

"No !—she has always been so reticent. She may have unbosomed herself to Miss Haller ; but, beyond that her confidence has not gone. To me she has always been so distant and reserved. Yet we know from experience—and I speak justly in the name of the whole household at Morr—that she is a lady of high capacity, and of most lovable and excellent character. Her duties to the children have been admirably

carried out ; for even by means of their pleasures she has taught them as few could teach."

"I know it," replied Mr. Palin earnestly ; "I know Edith Hexham well. I have been solicitor to her husband's family for many years, and might have stood in opposition to her interests, but I would not ; and now, quite apart from the question as a matter of conscience, I am glad that such was the case, for, as things have so strangely turned out, I am greatly able to help her. In order that you may understand the value of my communication, I must give you briefly an outline of her history. Her maiden name was Edith Liston. Her father, William Liston, was a surgeon of this town : a man of culture, and most skilful in his profession. Having been a surgeon in the army, he was of middle age when he settled here ; but possessing a small fixed income, and being of an easy, indolent temperament, he did not follow up as he should have done the fine professional opportunities which lay ready before him, and which far inferior men have since made their own, and acquired position and wealth thereby. He was afflicted, moreover, by a half insane woman for his wife, who rendered his home wretched, and embittered the lives of himself and his children. Yet, had he been industrious, he might have modified even this great evil by paying for her residence elsewhere, and by placing a sedate housekeeper at the head of his family.

"Opposite to the old-fashioned house in which Mr. Liston had settled, was a large and handsome one of brick, inhabited by a family named Hexham—at that date consisting of two elderly brothers and a maiden sister. The men were tanners ; and their trade having descended to them through several generations, they were very prosperous and wealthy. All their surroundings betokened this. They kept a carriage, possessed a good library, and often invited large parties to dinner or supper. For the entertainment of these the

house was fitting, for its rooms were large and charmingly furnished in an old-fashioned style ; and, moreover, it was most picturesquely situated in a suburban part of the town, with large gardens, an orchard and fields surrounding it, and an ancient mill-brook skirting the whole ; and, at a reasonable distance, so as to be hidden from sight, sound and smell, lay the extensive tannery. In this last, one of the best trades in the county was carried on ; the masters, as they advanced in years, giving but slight superintendence thereto, for they had worthy bookkeepers and foremen. Originally a third brother was a partner in the firm ; but upon the death of the father, some years previously, he had retired therefrom, and, settling as a farmer in an adjacent Welsh county, married and died there soon afterwards. The wife died also ; and then their only child—a daughter—was fetched away by her father's family, and adopted as their own. As time passed on, the girl grew in good looks, and became very dear to her aunt and younger uncle. Every educational advantage was lavished upon her, and it was the gossip of the town that they looked forward to a time when she might marry a man of a station greatly superior to her own, and that thus the family fortune would be well bestowed. But young Eleanor Hexham, unconscious of their ambitious views, visiting some of her mother's relations in Wales, was courted by a young country doctor of the name of Betton. Upon learning this, the friends fetched her home, and forbid all further acquaintanceship ; but by some means or another the young couple met and met again, and eventually made a secret marriage. The result was bitter enmity on the part of the two uncles, who forbid their niece their house ; and it was not till her husband died of malignant fever, caught while attending the population of a mining village, that their anger softened towards her. They then visited her, and contributed to her support and that of her three children,

and eventually invited her back to her old home. But she did not long survive the change; she had loved her husband very tenderly, and, full of grief for his loss, died in less than a year after.

"It was just prior to the young surgeon's death that the Listons and Hexhams became known to each other, for though as neighbours they had already lived opposite one another for several years, they had never spoken. But an accident occurred in the tanyard, and Mr. Liston, as the surgeon nearest at hand, was called in. The acquaintance thus begun soon ripened into pleasant intercourse. Miss Hexham liked to gossip with the doctor; and the younger brother John, who, though cold and formal, was an intelligent man, found pleasure in discussing political and local news,—and thus round the tea or supper-table the friends often met.

"Mr. Liston had four children; the three eldest being sons, the youngest a daughter. Edith, as yet a mere child, gave evidence of possessing great talents, though by all in her own household these were utterly unrecognised. Her father in his desultory way gave her lessons in Latin and writing; and, off and on, just as the bills could be paid, she attended some second-rate school, where little could be learnt; and, at intervals, she had lessons in French and music. But the last was not her gift, while art was. In absence of all instruction or sympathy with her tastes, two circumstances came into force which greatly aided her. A poor journeyman house-painter, who was her father's patient, gave her some instruction in the use of both brush and pencil—for, though self-taught, he was a skilful artist; and, in addition, he supplied her with colours, cardboard, and canvas. She also, in going to and fro to the house of a schoolfellow whose father was a marble and stone mason, saw how his men plied their chisels, and thus wrought forms from the solid. The master himself modelled well; and

often when at work with his clay and tools, and the children playing about his bench, he good-naturedly permitted them to amuse themselves as they would. His own child, soon tired, would take up some other play ; but Edith, after watching him earnestly, sought to imitate, in such scraps of clay as she was permitted to handle,—and soon the infinite skill of these imitations attracted the mason's eye. He encouraged her with tender words, and, ultimately, whenever she had a holiday and was at his house, he taught her the art of modelling.

“As her knowledge thus grew, its results had to be hidden from all at home except her youngest brother ; for, if her mother found a little picture or model, it was savagely destroyed, and by way of punishment she was set to do some sordid task in housework ; and when the doctor was told of these mischances, he merely smiled, for, though he loved his little daughter very tenderly, he could neither perceive, nor would he admit, that she possessed abilities of more than an ordinary kind. With blind infatuation he considered all the talents of his children were concentrated in his eldest son, who, a head scholar at the free school of the town, was presently to go to college, and thence to the bar ; while the second son was to be sent to the care of his godfather in Edinburgh, who was a surgeon, and would educate the youth to that profession.

“Prior to this date, Edith had become known to Miss Hexham, and the good-natured, kindly lady, pitying the child, encouraged her to spend as much time as she could with her ; and, only too glad to escape from the wretchedness of her home, Edith gladly obeyed. To the Hexhams' house, therefore, she would of a winter's evening carry her drawing or painting, and, while the motherly lady sat knitting, and the brothers smoked their pipes and read the newspapers, she painted little pictures, or drew some figure or landscape from

memory. The family, though they knew nothing of art, took a great interest in her humble performances, and jokingly called her their 'little artist,' and the brothers even went so far as to give her the use of a small room beside their offices in the courtyard, in which she could model and keep her clay,—for at home she had no place in which she could be at peace, or where anything was secure.

"While Edith was thus happy with her new friends, Mr. Betton died, and soon after the widow and her young children came from Wales to the care of their relatives. Through the few succeeding months that the poor heart-stricken lady lived, the girl took the greatest interest in her, and, when she died, this tender affection was transferred to the Betton children. Every moment Edith could spare from home was spent on the opposite side of the street, where, with all a girl's enthusiasm for young children, she acted as playmate and nurse. Arthur at this date was between seven and eight years old, Freda about five, and Iole a mere infant.

"Some twelve years previously, the Hexhams had in their service a pretty young girl named Sarah. She performed her duties admirably, and Miss Hexham was much attached to her. When, therefore, Sarah suddenly gave notice to leave, on the plea that an aunt in South Wales needed her services, her mistress was much concerned, for it would not be easy to supply her place; but the girl was proof against all offers of higher wages, and thus left. From this time till a few days after Mrs. Betton's funeral, nothing more was heard of her, except that she was in Wales; though there were ugly rumours abroad that, so far from being in Wales, she was residing in a village not three miles off, and was often seen in the town. But these rumours did not seem to reach the Hexhams; for when she re-appeared with a boy of about twelve years old, whom she called her son, and applied to Miss Hexham for the situation of upper servant then vacant,

she was gladly reinstated. Her tale to her mistress was that she had been married, and that her husband had lately died. John Hexham opposed her coming, but Thomas, the elder brother, was all for it ; and Miss Hexham liking accustomed faces about her, Sarah Hughes was in a few days chief in the kitchen, and at her mistress's right hand. Her boy was put to board at a neighbouring cottage, and, as the phrase went, 'was sent to school' ; but, more often than not, his days were passed in the Hexhams' kitchen. The younger brother, when he heard this, disapproved of it ; but Thomas, in his customary coarse manner, pooh-poohed, and laughed. 'If the boy is a comfort to his mother,' he said, 'let him be in the kitchen. A slice of bread and cheese more or less won't be missed in a house of plenty such as ours.' And thus Miss Hexham, not wishing to make strife, was silent on the subject ; though she disliked the boy, and strictly negatived his intrusion into the rooms occupied by the family.

"Sarah had thus been head-servant for about two years, the Betton children were thriving, and the brothers carrying still onward their long life of surly indifference to each other, when one Sunday morning in summer, Miss Hexham, while in church, had an apoplectic seizure, and, being carried home, died in less than an hour. Her death was a great blow to both brothers, for, though cold and undemonstrative, they had loved her very tenderly. She had been the sole bond of union between them ; and, as the townspeople remarked, 'Now Hannah Hexham is gone, the house will soon be divided against itself.' This prophecy proved a true one. The very day of their sister's funeral, a quarrel was commenced as to the division of her property ; and, a breach thus made, it widened day by day. They went to law with each other ; and their father's will having thrown almost exclusive power into the elder brother's hands, the result, as might be

expected, was against the interests of the younger, and he had to acquiesce in arrangements neither pleasant nor advantageous. As soon as this lawsuit was decided, Thomas said to John, 'I shall leave the old place and go more into the town to live. Old Peggy Barrett, our mother's servant, has lodgings to let, and I have already arranged to go to her. She cooks well, her rooms are comfortable, and I shall be near the news-rooms and the Talbot Hotel, where, when I like, I can see a friend or two.'

"'If so,' replied John sternly, 'take Sarah with you. I want neither her nor her son.'

"'No; she must remain here,' was the reply. 'It is to the interests of both of us she should. There is much family property about, and she is a trusty woman. Sarah can have her eye on most things; and as to her lad, for whom you have no liking, it is only a charity to let him be in the house with his mother. It will be convenient too, for I mean to put him into the business pretty soon. Arthur, depend upon it, will be like his father—what they call 'a born gentleman,'—and so, of course, will not soil his hands with the tan-pits. But it will be different with Tom Hughes. In time, if he is steady—as no doubt he will be—he may be very useful. We are elderly men, John, and must look to the future.'

"Rather than break wholly with his brother, John gave way silently to this arrangement, though it cost him an effort to do so; and Thomas removed to his lodgings in the town. There he led a life of mingled self-indulgence and parsimony; for though he lived high, and denied himself no luxury, he was by nature miserly and selfish in the extreme. All these changes in the Hexhams' household did not pass unnoticed. Observers were keen enough to judge that Sarah Hughes was a mere spy upon the actions of the younger brother; and time has proved that this and other surmises were correct.

"Another step, probably at the instance of this bad woman, was soon taken.

"John," said Thomas one day, when he had come to the courtyard office on business; "I've been thinking over the question of the Betton children. I liked neither father nor mother; and I think you and I, now Hannah is gone, should be troubled no longer with them. Let them go back to Wales. I have been making some inquiries, and I find that their father's aunt, a needy old gentlewoman, will gladly take them for a moderate yearly sum. Let her have their charge. At your age and mine, we want no responsibility of this sort."

"John's wrath rose up at this.

"What!" he questioned, "am I to have no will of my own in this house? Am I to be dictated to in everything? May I not spend my substance as I please? And certainly it is not misspent in the nurture of our brother's grandchildren. In *this* I shall do as I please."

"No more was said just then; but John Hexham was made to feel the weight and care of his responsibility. The children often teased him; Sarah often complained of them; constant interruptions disturbed the orderly formal life he had been so long accustomed to. The end soon came. The elderly gentlewoman was summoned from Wales, and the children were consigned to her care. But John Hexham still did his duty by them. Occasionally he visited them, and twice or thrice each summer, and always at Christmas, they spent some days at his house.

"Thus there was formal quietude in his home once more; but it was not the quietude of former days, when companionship and sympathy with his excellent sister lent their charms, when old friends gathered round the cheerful table, and children's voices were heard about the place. He grew depressed, and aged visibly. He took long country walks,

but their effect was to deepen his melancholy ; and the old-fashioned books to which he turned for amusement no longer afforded it. This was an unnatural state of things, for John Hexham was a well-read man, particularly in the literature and political history of the last century."

For some time Dr. Marlow had been moving impatiently in his chair ; but now he rose abruptly, and, walking up and down, said, in that sharp stern manner so habitual to him when at Castle Morr,—

"Excuse me, sir : I feel no interest in this man John Hexham. Whether he was an enlightened reader or not, is to me of no account. What I am impatient to learn, is the particulars of his marriage with Edith. These are of account to me—of very much account indeed." As he spoke thus, Dr. Marlow rather hastened than retarded the rapidity of his steps.

"I am coming to them shortly," was the grave reply ; "but unless you listen to the few previous details, you will hardly understand the early baptism in suffering the young girl had, nor the perfect measure of justice the events of the few past days bring to her and the children. I will be as brief as I can. One day, in going through a country lane on his way to some river scenery of exceeding beauty, John Hexham met Mr. Liston. Their greeting was cordial, for they had seen little of each other since the sister's death. The doctor had removed further into the town, and the tanner's house was no longer hospitably open to friends and guests.

"It was a fine day, and the friends walked on together. John Hexham spoke of his solitude, and the depression he had felt since his sister's death and the removal of the Betton children ; and the doctor unburdened himself of his own troubles—the anxieties connected with his home and the education of his sons. The expenses of the one at

college had been much greater than he had anticipated, and he knew not how to meet several heavy payments then due. As a conclusion to this revelation, he asked John Hexham for the loan of one hundred pounds.

"The tanner was a little startled ; but he liked the doctor, and had a compassionate ear for his sorrows. So, after some natural hesitation to lend so considerable a sum to a needy man, he consented, and in a graceful, kindly manner.

"'But,' he added, 'do not come to the house for it, for Sarah has an eye and an ear for everything. Meet me in the lane here this day week, and you shall have it. I cannot say earlier ; for to procure so large a sum, situated as I am, will necessitate the connivance of a friend ; as all monetary affairs are in the hands of Thomas.'

"The money was lent, and the burdens were removed ; but only to be renewed at no late date. In less than a twelvemonth a second hundred was solicited and obtained, though under protests that would have been very galling to one less easy tempered.

"'Your son should work, Mr. Liston,' reasoned the practical man, 'in place of involving you in these serious difficulties ; and you, on your part, foreseeing that you had no reasonable hope of supporting him while at college, should have made his start in life a less ambitious one.'

"'He is very clever,' reasoned the father ; 'my expectations of his future are most hopeful, for none of my children have talents like his.'

"Mr. Hexham shook his head, and thought of Edith, whose great gifts none of her family recognised.

"A few evenings after this, being out for his customary walk, he met Edith and her father. John Hexham had not seen her for more than a twelvemonth—indeed, but twice since his sister's death ; for with commendable prudence the half-insane mother, wise in many things nevertheless, had

kept her daughter from the Hexhams' house. Ugly rumours were afloat respecting Sarah Hughes, and no one liked her.

"John Hexham marvelled at the change which had come over the girl. She was a child when he had seen her last; now she was just budding into early womanhood. Her form and face were beautiful; and not less charming, in his grave and elderly eyes, were her modesty, earnestness, and unconscious simplicity. He spoke to her of his dead sister and of the Betton children, and her answers touched his heart as nothing else had done for many a day. An idea flashed suddenly across his mind; he wished to think it over; he hastened his cordial good-day, and then passed on.

"When at a sufficient distance to be unobserved, he paused and looked after her.

"'Most charming!' he said, 'most charming! Dare I think of such a thing—she so young, I so old? Yet I could make her very happy, and she—well, she would bring joy and brightness into my home once more. The children could come back again, and I could get rid of Sarah and her lad, who is far too impertinent and forward for my liking. I will think this over. Before long, no doubt, there will be another borrowing. Then I will broach my scheme, though sweet Edith is far too good a girl to be made the object of barter; but if I am to lend again, and come to open rupture with Thomas, as I must, I must have an equivalent.'

"An attempt to borrow a third hundred pounds was, as expected, soon made; and then it was that John Hexham opened out his scheme.

"'If I lend further, Mr. Liston,' he said, with great gravity, 'it is upon a condition you may not—probably will not—like.'

"'What is it?'

"'That you will give me Edith in marriage.'

"'Marriage!' exclaimed the father, humiliated and

shocked in the extreme. 'Edith is but a child as yet. She is not yet seventeen. And you——'

"'I am sixty-two,' was the brave and manly answer; 'and I am not ashamed of my years. You ask me for my money, and I naturally ask you for an equivalent. You can accept or refuse my offer as you please. I love and honour the girl, and I can make her very happy. She would brighten my home as no one else could; I could have back those poor children, and I could get rid of Sarah and her vulgar lad. If I lend you a third hundred pounds, Mr. Liston, it will be at the cost of a rupture with Thomas, for he has already been making inquiry as to my use of the two previous sums; and on my withdrawal of a third he will insist upon knowing. I can brave his anger for the sake of Edith—not without. Such are my terms.'

"'I cannot listen to them,' replied the father firmly. 'I have no right to sacrifice my child.'

"'Then our conference is at an end, Mr. Liston,' said the tanner; and, bowing formally, he went his way.

"The difficulty of the day was tided over in some way or another; but new ones, still more formidable, soon presented themselves. There was a Cambridge wine bill, boot bill, boat bill, and others, and a large demand from the Edinburgh godfather. What could be done? There was nothing but anguish in the Listons' house. The father was in despair, the mother furious; for she hated her eldest son, and had vehemently opposed his being sent to Cambridge. 'You should make him a bookseller, or a clerk,' she said,—'not a fine gentleman.' Considering that his father would not work to pay his expenses there, what she advised was but just.

"Lawyers' letters came in. An arrest was imminent. Edith, young as she was, was the only one in the house who took a practical view of the ruin involved.

“‘Papa,’ she said, bending down to him as he sat at his desk with his face buried in his hands, ‘something *must* be done. Cannot you ask Mr. Hexham again? When you explain to him how utter and absolute ruin stares us all in the face, he may lend the money.’

“‘He would have lent it to me when I asked him last week, could I have complied with his request. But it wasn’t to be thought of.’

“‘What was it? Do tell me.’

“The father shook his head. For shame he could not speak. If ever he wished he had been self-helpful, it was now.

“‘Do tell me; because our situation is a very serious one.’

“‘It *is* very serious,’ was the answer; ‘and I see but one way out of it, and that is——’

“She divined his meaning, and trembled with anguish from head to foot. Once or twice previous to this, he had hinted at this cowardly method of deliverance.

“‘Papa,’ she said again, ‘do tell me. Is it anything in which I can help?’

“Mr. Liston was silent for a moment or two; and then he replied in a broken voice, ‘His request relates to you.’

“‘Me! I cannot understand. Do tell me!’

“‘Well, not here,’ the father said at last. ‘Put on your hat; we will go into the Quarry; we shall be quiet there.’

“The girl complied; and they went together to our famous public walk, where there are, as you may have seen, Dr. Marlow, this morning, four splendid avenues of elm trees, sward, seats, and a fine terrace by the river. Here, in the silent shadows of the evening, with not a passer-by, they sat down.

“‘Well, papa! What is it?’

“With difficulty the father got out his words. ‘Edith,’ he said, ‘John Hexham wants to marry you.’

“‘Marry me, papa?’ Why, I am yet a girl—not yet seventeen—and he is an old man. I have always looked upon him as a very old man.’

“‘Yes; he is sixty-two, but still hale and active. He says that, being alone, he is very depressed; but with you he could be so happy. He would have those poor Betton children home, and he could get rid of Sarah and her boy. In fact, a new life would spring up before him.’

“‘The girl was silent for some minutes, and then she said sadly, ‘I do love the Betton children dearly, for I have been so used to them, and from time to time have missed them so much. But, papa, I am but a girl, and this cannot be.’

“‘No; it cannot be,’ echoed the father with something like relief. Then they rose to go.

“‘Papa,’ said Edith on their way homeward, ‘say nothing to mamma about this. She is so worldly and speculative, that she would be all for this scheme if a word were hinted.’

“‘So they went back to their home of utter wretchedness; and there was silence on all that had been spoken. But on the morrow, when the writ was served, and her father was about to be taken away, and it was arranged that an inventory of the household goods for sale should be taken on the morrow, the girl was greatly moved, and made her resolution. She loved her father passionately, and to do that for him which was very painful was duty, not sacrifice. She took the sheriff’s officer aside, and asked him to withdraw a moment while she spoke to her father. The officer went without the door, and they were alone.

“‘Papa,’ she said with trembling lips, yet firmly, ‘I will marry Mr. Hexham. Anything so that you are not taken away from us—anything!’

“‘No, no, Edith; you are too young.’

“‘Papa,’ she interrupted, ‘this is no time for sentiment.

We must act. How can you communicate with Mr. Hexham ?'

"Vacillating, partly ashamed, partly glad, now saying 'no,' then saying 'yes,' the father asked Edith to summon her mother.

" 'You know well *she* will consent,' said the girl, with something like irony. '*Any* scheme from which profit can be drawn will be acceptable to her.'

"Edith's opinion was a correct one. Her mother was unconscious of any shame or impropriety in the marriage of a girl so young to one so old. She saw only the deliverance from immediate ruin ; and the prospect of a son-in-law whose purse might be called upon at will. So she not only gave her glad consent, but urged that no time should be lost in bringing John Hexham to make a formal promise, and then fulfil it.

"This decision arrived at, the difficulty was how to convey it to 'Auld Robin Gray.' The father could not go ; Edith could not go ; the urgency of the case was too pressing to admit of a letter by post. It must be sent by hand. A messenger was therefore found, and the father wrote as follows :—

" 'Your proposal is accepted. Will you therefore come into the town at once ?
W. L.'

"The boy sent was told to run quickly, and, avoiding the house, knock at the office door in the courtyard, and deliver the note into Mr. John Hexham's hand. He obeyed ; and, as it happened, the tanner sat alone, for it was noon, and the two book-keepers had gone away to dinner. He was in no very cheerful mood, for Sarah had been saucy that morning, her boy intrusive, and the solitude of the house, as he left it after breakfast, had been oppressive in the extreme. But when he read the note, a great joy filled his heart.

“‘Tell Mr. Liston,’ he said, speaking as calmly as he could, and while he gave the boy a shilling, ‘that I will come directly.’

“When he was again alone, he sat for some minutes to think over the new life which thus opened itself before him. He was rejoiced ; yet sorrow mingled with his joy. ‘What parents,’ he thought to himself, ‘to thus sacrifice a beautiful and gifted girl to the extravagance of a worthless son ! But I know how good she is, and that my dear and revered sister Hannah loved her and thought highly of her ; and that she will be, young as she is, a true mother to those poor Betton children. Yes ! the joy of my life will be to be very good to her, to raise her above want, and to think I have saved her from the life of domestic drudgery to which the wild virago of a mother, in the absence of a servant, seeks to condemn her. Poor child ! hers is a hard lot ; but I will soften it. She shall have instruction in the arts she loves, and I will take her here and there to see fine galleries and collections. We will have those poor children home, and I will get rid of Sarah and her detestable boy. Once more the house shall be what it was in dear Hannah’s time—a place of honour, cheerfulness, hospitality, and homely comfort.’

“Without delay he went into the town and to the bank ; and, without concealment, drew more than the needful hundred pounds. Then he proceeded to the solicitor who had issued the writ against Mr. Liston, and paid his demand in full, and, with the release in his hand, hastened to the doctor’s house. In a few moments the sheriff’s officer was gone, and John Hexham was alone with the parents.

“‘I make my formal offer for your daughter’s hand,’ he said with old-fashioned courtesy ; ‘and I understand I am accepted. This being the case, I shall like the marriage to take place as soon as possible.’

“‘Edith is very young ; she is not yet seventeen,’ said the mother. ‘You must wait till she is.’

“‘That is in about two months?’

“‘Yes ; and you must get rid of Sarah Hughes and her boy. Edith shall not go where they are.’

“‘I do not intend she should,’ was the grave reply. ‘Edith, as my wife, shall be mistress in her own home—perfect mistress ; and I will do all I can to make her happy. On her seventeenth birthday, or as soon after as may be, we will be married ; and in the interval her new home shall be prepared for her.’

“‘That will cost money,’ was the reply ; ‘and Edith on her part will want many things.’

“‘She shall want for nothing.’ And ‘Auld Robin Gray,’ who was quite prepared for this demand, took ten sovereigns from his purse and laid them on the table. Then he turned to the doctor, who sat passive all this time, and asked him for his note of hand for three hundred and forty pounds—the amount in full of the sums borrowed and paid. When this was written out on a stamped paper which John Hexham produced from his pocket-book, and he had carefully replaced the document therein, he turned to the mother and asked to see Edith—for, upon his entrance, she had gone upstairs. Her mother found her seated by a window, outwardly calm, but looking pale and depressed.

“‘The sheriff’s officer is gone,’ the mother said, ‘and your father has given Mr. Hexham his note of hand for the whole sum due to him—three hundred and forty pounds. In return he has promised to do very handsomely by you, and says you must be prepared to marry him on your seventeenth birthday, or as soon after as may be. That is, in about two months’ time from this date.’

“‘Very well,’ was the quiet reply. ‘And you made it a

stipulation that Sarah Hughes and her boy should not remain ?'

" 'He readily promised that, for he likes neither. I also told him you would want many things ; and, see here, he has given me *this*.' And the mother held out her hand and showed the money, adding, as she did so, 'You will want more than *this* ; and I shall tell him so.'

" 'Mother !' and the girl, rising angry and flushed, bent back her mother's hand and pushed it away indignantly from her, 'why did you speak such words ?—they are a shame to us. If I must marry this man, I will have my own way in it. I will have neither his money nor presents beforehand ; and if there must be a dress or anything, it must be my own, not his.'

" 'Well, do as you like,' was the reply. And the mother left the room in a fury.

" 'The girl sat down for some minutes and wept bitterly. Then, knowing she must go, she bathed her eyes and smoothed her hair, and went downstairs. 'Auld Robin Gray' received her with glad courtesy, and led her into a room where he could speak to her alone.

" 'Edith,' he said, 'this arrangement makes me very happy. You will, I know, make my home what it long was—a place of honour and cheerfulness. I will, on my part, be the best and tenderest of husbands, and, shielding you from everything which is mean and sordid, you will have time to follow the beautiful arts you love. We will have the Betton children home, and Sarah and her boy shall go.'

" 'That is a necessity,' she replied concisely.

" 'It is so. Meanwhile, you must let me know what I can do for you,—what dresses you need, what jewellery I can give you.'

" 'You must give me nothing ; and you will offend me if

you do. You have already done me great wrong by giving mamma money. For this reason do not come here again—at least, not often. I am a young girl yet, and you must consider this. What I want I can get. Mr. Mudge, in the High Street, is going to sell a small picture I have lately painted, and the proceeds of this will suffice for what I shall need.'

"As you please, Edith. Your will is a law to me. I see thus early that your principle is very different to that of the people by whom you are surrounded. But you must let me give you some little token of my great love—a ring, say !'

"Nothing, thank you, Mr. Hexham.'

Nothing ! Surely some little token which was once my sister's. She had nice jewellery.'

"She had. Well, there was a pearl brooch that she once said I should have. If you like to give it to me by-and-by, you can ; but not till then.' And as she was inexorable on this and other points, he soon took his fatherly leave and went.

"But he was thoroughly in earnest," continued Mr. Palin ; "and next day made known to his brother his determination to marry Edith. As may be imagined, a terrible scene ensued. Thomas Hexham was mad with rage, and vowed he would take every means he could to ruin John if he married such a child. He taunted him, and told him that their father's will had left *him* master of everything, and that he would use his power to the full ; and he added that he—John—would be the laughing-stock of the town, and looked upon as a foolish old man who had been taken in by a 'pack of sharpers.' In reply John said but little. Nothing moved him from his purpose. He told Sarah that she must go, and take her boy with her. At first she was insolent, and said that he had no power to turn her out ; but in the

course of a few days she changed her mood—at the bidding of Thomas, as she only yesterday confessed to me—so as to be a spy on all going on, and, apologising for her rudeness, civilly requested to remain till the young lady came home as Mr. Hexham's wife. And as John Hexham was aware that Sarah would be useful in preparing his house for his bride, her desire was unsuspiciously acceded to.

“Workmen were at once put into the house to paper and paint it, and new carpets, furniture, and many other things were chosen. No cost was spared. As the days thus went on he came to me to prepare his will, as also a settlement on Edith. I took the liberty of an old and confidential friend to expostulate with him on the step he was about to take, but his reply was resolute and brief. ‘Mr. Palin,’ he said, ‘I do not ask you to advise, but to act. My private affairs are my sole concern. If you do not like to effect this needful business, say so, and I will go elsewhere.’

“Such a mood as this was not to be negated or trifled with,” continued Mr. Palin; “and the necessary documents were at once prepared. Upon revisiting my office to sign, Mr. Hexham said, ‘I am glad to have dealt liberally by Edith. She is a noble girl, possessing, for one so young, much common sense; and her independence of character is marvellous considering her rearing and environments. I rarely see her; but when at the doctor's house last night, to make some necessary arrangements, he told me that Mudge in the High Street had sold for five pounds a little picture she had painted. It had been in his window only two days, and the purchaser was so charmed as to request that a fellow landscape might be put in hand. With the money thus honourably obtained she is going to buy her wedding dress. Thus you see, Palin, she is a noble girl. She will brighten my hearth,—I know she will. My dear niece's children can come home, for she has been accustomed

to them, and loves them as tenderly as they love her, and thus will be a mother to them.'

"I then," continued Mr. Palin, "asked him when his wedding would take place.

"He replied, 'On the 12th of July,' and he invited me thereto. But I declined—not wishing to be a witness of such a sacrifice; and one which, as human affairs generally go, could only end in misery."

All the while the solicitor had been narrating this strange history, Dr. Marlow had been walking up and down in a state of nervous excitement strange to see; but now, as its climax approached, he paused abruptly and stood opposite to where Mr. Palin sat—wishing, as it seemed, to hear, yet hardly daring to listen. For some reason or other his interest was profound.

"Although much of the town gossip reached my ears," continued Mr. Palin, "I saw nothing of John Hexham till the day before that fixed for his wedding. He then came here and asked for his will and Edith's settlement. 'When I have made her my wife to-morrow,' he said, 'I shall be proud to show her that I have acted justly by her interests. I will therefore take these papers with me.'

"'Will it not be better,' I replied, 'to bring Edith here to see them? Or let me take them to you any evening you may fix. Such papers are best in safe custody.'

"'Who should touch them?' he asked, with an irritation I had never hitherto observed; 'who should touch them? No! I will take them with me, and you can have them again.'

"He took the papers and was about to go, when, thinking perhaps he had answered me too sharply—for he knew I was Edith's friend—he turned round kindly, just without the office door, saying,—

"'If you can come to luncheon, Palin, we shall be glad to see you.'

"All in a moment," continued Mr. Palin, "it crossed my mind that if I went I might see to the safety of the will; so I replied, quickly and pleasantly, 'As you wish it, I will, though at present we are busy. What time do you lunch?'"

"He replied 'About two o'clock'; and, nodding kindly, went.

"It rose a most lovely summer's morning, and, as I passed the bridge and our old abbey where the marriage ceremony had taken place, I could not help thinking how many mornings as fair had risen upon human sacrifices as sad and even sadder. When I reached the courtyard of the house, I met a workman I knew. All the men employed were about to have a dinner in one of the drying rooms, and he was helping with the preparations. I stayed and asked him where I should find Mr. and Mrs. Hexham.

"'The master and the new missus, and some of the people who have been at the wedding, are in the garden, sir.'

"'And Sarah and her boy,' I said: 'I hope they are gone.'

"'Well, yes, sir, but not far off. She has the old master at her back, and she'll hang by the place, you'll see.' And, observing thus, he smiled and went his way.

"A few other guests were arriving; but, as they were unknown to me, I passed through the house to the pleasant garden beyond, seeing in my progress the bustle and preparation for the marriage feast. There on the lawn, under the shade of some fine old trees, was gathered quite a Watteau-like group: the bride and bridegroom, Mr. Liston, and about four other friends. Edith looked very pretty in her simple dress, but she was pale and silent. She rose to greet me; so did her husband,—who, for one usually so reserved and silent, was strangely gay and talkative. He had a merry word for everybody; and as each new-come guest crossed the lawn from the house he rose, though sitting down again instantly, to retake Edith's passive hand in his, with the tender air of a father rather than a husband.

"The guests had all arrived, and conversation had become general among them, when luncheon was announced. Then John Hexham rose, and, placing his wife's hand on his arm, led the way indoors to the spacious dining-room—the guests following. Some had taken their seats, others had not; and John Hexham had just placed his wife in hers, when, all in a moment, he uttered an agonized cry of pain, threw up his hands wildly, staggered and fell. A dozen arms had in a moment raised him from the ground, and placed him on a couch, but only to witness the last flutter of his breath. The man was dead!"

"Dead!" repeated Dr. Marlow, with passionate vehemence, and laying his eager hand on the solicitor's shoulder as he spoke: "then she did not live with this man a year, a month, or a day?"

"She was his wife three hours! A bride at 11 a.m., a widow at 2 p.m."

"Why did you not tell me this before? Why not spare me so much mental anguish? Good Heaven! this joy is almost too great for me!"

Then the man, usually so self-possessed and stern, sank down in the nearest chair, and wept like a child.

"Excuse me, sir," he said presently, "but I love Edith Hexham, and wish to make her my wife. I have loved her long—since the night I first saw her pale and anxious face in the shop of a London picture-dealer. I have loved her passionately since then—and I have some idea that my love is returned."

A smile flitted across Mr. Palin's face; but he kept silence, and waited patiently till his visitor spoke again.

"I feared," he said, "that Edith had been the companion of this man for months. But the facts are so different to those I imagined and dreaded, that my soul is indeed rejoiced."

"They are as I state them," said the solicitor gravely, "and the whole story is more like an Italian romance of the Middle Ages, than one belonging to an English town, not so many years ago. Edith Hexham was a wife merely in name. A few words more will suffice to tell the rest. Of course such an event as that of a man falling down dead on his wedding-day excited the greatest commotion. Thomas Hexham was at once sent for—and an hour later Sarah Hughes was again upon the scene. The instant I saw that the bridegroom was dead, the safety of his will and Edith's settlement occupied my thoughts. Taking advantage of the commotion and my position as the family adviser, I at once looked around for them, but in vain. I searched his office, and all easily accessible closets and drawers, but they were not there; and, necessarily, as soon as the brother arrived, my opportunity ceased. Then I saw instantly what course it was best to pursue. I drew Edith aside. 'By right and law,' I said, 'you are in your proper home; but with your husband's brother in possession, and with such power as his father's will places in his hand, and which he will assuredly exercise to the full, you had better return to your father's house, and leave to me the guidance of your affairs.' She was only too glad to take my advice; and, making use of a carriage which waited in the courtyard for one of the guests, I took her back, a widowed bride, to her old and unhappy home.

"Though sought for everywhere, neither will nor settlement could be found. Thomas Hexham suggested that his brother, repenting of his folly, had destroyed both; and Sarah Hughes declared that the night before the wedding, being temporarily in the house, she had, upon entering John's sitting-room, found him in the act of destroying papers. I disbelieved both statements, and I had Sarah twice examined before a magistrate, but without eliciting

any facts which in this one respect told against her, or cleared up the mystery. Thomas Hexham could not wholly break with me, as I was a trustee under his father's will and possessed legal powers of which he could not deprive me. But, so far as he could, he employed other solicitors in opposition to me in Edith's affairs. He made out that his brother had died largely in his debt; and finding in the dead man's pocket-book Mr. Liston's note of hand for the three hundred and forty pounds borrowed and paid, he had the surgeon arrested and thrown into jail. Other creditors pressed their claims; his surgery fixtures and household goods were sold, and his utter ruin was accomplished. After spending about five months in a debtors' prison, a few friends joined in procuring his release, but only for him to die a few months after of what is called a 'broken heart.' Meanwhile I fought Edith's business point by point with Thomas Hexham's solicitors; but his power under his father's will was great, and in the end I saw it would be best to submit to the arbitration the others proposed. The result of this was the payment of a few hundred pounds to Edith—which, alas! were speedily spent upon her wretched family—and the securing a yearly annuity of sixty pounds for the support and education of the Betton children. For about a year Edith struggled on with her mother; living in a mean lodging, and supporting her and her youngest brother by the sale of small pictures, placed in various shop windows. But this livelihood was most precarious. At last she came to me and said, 'My youngest brother has at length obtained a clerkship in Liverpool, and some wealthy relations in the eastern counties are helping the two eldest; so I shall go to London, Mr. Palin. There I can pursue my studies in sculpture and painting, and perhaps sell my pictures better than I do here. At any rate I shall be free of mamma, whose temper and eccentricities are fast becoming un-

endurable. If I continue with her, I feel I must die. Some friends are kindly endeavouring to procure her an appointment to Heston Hospital ; and if they are successful, I shall be freed from the burden of her support. In that case I can do more than is now possible for those poor Betton children, whose case is a sad one, now their father's old relation is dead and they have had to be removed to cheap schools. From old associations I love them dearly ; and though their relationship to me is so slight, I shall ever regard their claim as that of children on a parent.'

"Edith removed to London, and began work at once in the *atelier* of a well-known sculptor. She studied painting in the Government School of Design, and, during such leisure as she had, executed small pictures for sale. From time to time I corresponded with her, as the annuity belonging to the Betton children passed through my hands, and occasionally some friend or another, pitying her misfortunes and admiring her high character, made me the agent of their bounty. For two years she had to support her mother. Then the appointment to Heston Hospital came, and she was freed from a great burden and enabled to remove Arthur and his sisters from their respective schools in Wales to others in the neighbourhood of London, where in their holidays they stayed with her.

"Shortly after this," continued Mr. Palin, "I had a serious and lengthened illness, upon my recovery from which my physician ordered me to the Continent. There I remained a year ; all business meanwhile being transacted by my sons. Thus I lost sight of Mrs. Hexham for some time. Upon my return I heard incidentally that, accompanied by the Betton children, she had gone to Ireland. I wondered, and was concerned lest she should have dropped into unfriendly hands. I at once returned to London, and made inquiries at the lodgings to which I had addressed

my letters. There I heard of her severe illness, and of the unwearied kindness of Dr. Granville and other friends. I sought this eminent physician, and learnt from him all the particulars of her struggling and anxious life, her nearly fatal illness, the kindly plot by means of which she was lured from London to Castle Morr, and of her happiness, recovered health, and dignified utility in her new position. Dr. Granville gave me also a glowing picture of your own noble character, Dr. Marlow, as also those of Miss Haller and the Ladies Clare. With respect to the last I knew much, for I am agent to a relative of theirs. I was also aware of Lord Donore's concealed existence on account of his revolting personal deformity. His high mental capacity and generous character were also known to me, for through me was transacted the business relative to a bequest to Heston Hospital. Thus assured of her safety and happiness, I wrote to Mrs. Hexham ; and since then have corresponded with her at intervals in relation to her husband's affairs, and the annuity it has been my province to transmit for the service of the Betton children. I wish this were all ; but the demands of her worthless relations have never ceased, and I have had to write my warnings and expostulations,—with little effect, I fear, for I well know her tender and generous nature.

“ There remains but little further to say. As a matter of course, Sarah Hughes was soon both master and mistress in her old home, and her boy was apprenticed to Thomas Hexham—or, more plainly speaking, his father. Indulged by his mother to an unlimited extent, the coarse, intrusive, vulgar lad speedily developed into a worthless man. He was soon the terror of the tannery for his brutality and evil deeds. All the old workmen hated him. He went on from bad to worse : got into debt, took to drinking, and was concerned in innumerable private brawls. His pretension and insolence were unbounded ; for, avoided on this account by young

men of a superior class, he was for ever assailing them, and about a month ago, in an encounter of the kind—in which, as the police witnessed, he was the aggressor—he fell, being tipsy, on the edge of the kerb-stone in one of our principal streets, fractured his skull, and in an hour after was dead. Following this came the death of Thomas Hexham. For some time he had been complaining of slight indisposition ; and one morning, not rising as usual, his landlady went into his room and found him dead in bed. He had died of heart-disease—the family complaint.

Fortunately my managing clerk lives in the neighbourhood, and thus heard of the old man's death almost as soon as it was discovered. At once he came to me ; and I, with a gentleman who resides a few doors off, and who with me is co-trustee of the elder Hexham's property, hastened to the house where Thomas Hexham lay, in order to take possession of and secure his effects. Various business papers were lying about ; so, taking some keys from the dead man's pockets, in order to place them in safety, we opened what we knew to be a private drawer in a desk in his sitting-room, and there, to our astonishment, almost as soon as we opened it, we saw a paper marked 'Edith Hexham's marriage settlement,' and beneath this lay her husband's will ! We at once took possession of both ; and thus had proof enough of Thomas Hexham's villainy. Upon oath he had denied having even seen them—much less had them in possession ; and here he had died with them, as it were, in his hand.

The co-trustee and myself at once decided how to act. As soon as we had set our seal upon the dead man's effects, we went off to the chief police court, stated our business to the officer in charge, and secured the services of two constables in plain clothes. With these men we drove to the tannery. Leaving them and the gentleman in what had been John Hexham's office, I went round by the garden into

the house, as quietly as I could. It was evident at once that the news of the base man's death had already reached there, for the kitchen was all in confusion, and the sound of moving feet and muttering tongues could be heard upstairs. I called the trustee and the police; and we went upstairs together, there to find, in what had been Miss Hexham's bedroom, Sarah and two women, hurriedly tying up bundles and packing boxes. I at once stayed their operations by giving them in charge; and then, locking up the various rooms till the day of the funeral, left a trusted servant from the tannery in possession. Nothing could be done till the old man was buried. Then, after the strictest search, no will was found, though his intention of making one at an early date was testified to by the discovery of its draft, drawn out only a few days prior to the death of Thomas Hughes. By this all the Betton property was assigned to that young man. But these unjust intentions were frustrated, and Thomas Hexham, by thus dying intestate, leaves Arthur Betton lawful and undisputed heir to a very handsome fortune, in addition to the considerable sum the business and tannery premises may sell for—for we have found that the largest part of the debts Thomas charged upon his brother John's estate have no existence whatsoever, the documents relating to them being forgeries. Edith's settlement and her husband's will being thus forthcoming, stand good in law, and secure to her a handsome provision; and I should add that, so soon as Sarah Hughes found herself in custody, she, with a view to staying prosecution, made a clean breast of everything—not only as to the paternity of her son, and the purloining of the settlement and will, but the scandalous part of treachery and fraud she had been playing for years in the Hexhams' household. She is still in custody, and undergoes a second examination at the police court to-morrow. The spoils she has given up are

great as to value and number ; and they will become Edith's, as they are almost all articles of plate and jewellery secured to her by her husband's will."

"A husband merely in name—a three-hours' husband," interposed Dr. Marlow, as though jealous of the word.

"All the happier for you," replied Mr. Palin gravely ; "and if this young woman of large gifts and high principle accepts you, you are to be envied. Now, will you, or shall I, go the necessary journey to Heston Hospital, or shall we go together?" And, as he asked this question, a smile flitted across the solicitor's face.

"I will go," replied Dr. Marlow eagerly ; "I will go alone. To-morrow, if I am fortunate, I can bring her here. I will go at once."

"Not exactly that," advised the solicitor : "dine with me, and start about four p.m. The mother is buried, I believe, this afternoon, and it would be ill-timed to interrupt the funeral, even with joyful news. The Hospital is but five-and-twenty miles away, and you will reach it in two hours, or little more."

Dr. Marlow acted upon this sensible advice ; and at four o'clock started from the beautiful old border town for that much lesser town beneath the Wrekin, and not far away from the Ketley ridges, where stretch for miles infinite coal and iron mines, and as great a number of blast furnaces. Here, emerging from the station, he called a cab, and looked at his watch. It was five o'clock ; the twilight of the still February evening was settling down, and the great lights upon the Ketley ridge began to show against the darkening sky.

"Is the horse fresh ?" he asked the driver.

"Just from the stable, sir, after a long rest."

"Don't distress it ; yet let it go its pace."

"Where to, sir ?"

"To Heston Hospital."

"It'll go fast enough there, sir. It always gets a feed of corn; Jack will need no whip."

They set off, and soon emerging from the outskirts of the town, gained the clearer twilight of the open country. To the left was the Wrekin, with its wooded crags lying in shadow; to the right, a charming undulating park, with its mere glimmering in patches in the misty light; and beyond, the Ketley ridges began to glow against the darkened sky. The park passed, there came a more open country of wide fields, farmsteads, and cottages—a canal which runs many a mile threading its way between. Then a more solitary country, through which the lane-like highway passed in inconceivable tortuous fashion—a veritable sign of long-gone days, when roads, mere pathways through dense forest, were struck and followed where foothold could be best taken. But the road on either hand was open enough now: wide fields stretching away into misty and undistinguishable distance, leaving hedgerows and brown fallows to mark the foreground. A bridge over a narrow rivulet, and then an acclivity began. At the top of this, the Hospital, a large handsome building built round three sides of a square, came into sight; its two storeys of windows on the side the stranger approached bright with many fires, of which the gleams scintillated far away across solitary fields, on upland ridges, and the Wrekin crags.

Passing a field and a garden hedge, the driver stayed his horse before a large white gate; a lodge and shrubbery on either side, and an avenue beyond; at the end of this were handsome palisading and ornamental gates leading into a grassy quadrangle, the two opposite sides being cloistered.

"This is Heston Hospital, sir," said the driver: "shall I go in and up the avenue?"

"Is there a more private way?"

"Yes, sir ; at the side, a little beyond, through a field by the church. The stables are here, in the left-hand lodge."

"Then put up your horse, and I will let you know presently when it is I return. I will walk the rest of the way."

Dr. Marlow proceeded ; and, as he approached the little rustic church, which with a farmhouse occupied the centre of the village street, he saw two men in a secluded part of the picturesque churchyard at work beating down turf upon a new-filled grave. Thinking he might hear from them some particulars of the recent funeral, he leaned on the low wall and spoke.

"Yes, sir ; old Mrs. Liston was buried at four o'clock. She was a beautiful old lady, but very fractious. It took a deal o' patience to bear with her."

"And her daughter? How did she get through the funeral ceremony?"

"Well, she did take on a good bit, sir, for the old lady had quarrelled with her as she quarrelled with everybody. But you see, sir, she was still alive when her daughter reached the Hospital, and, for a wonder, pretty right in her mind for a little time. So she knew her, and spoke some tender words ; and these no doubt put away from the young lady's thoughts the many years of trouble she had had with her. This is why, maybe, Mrs. Hexham cried so while the parson read the service and we threw the earth down on the coffin. Perhaps, sir, you don't know the young lady's strange story?"

"What is it?" Dr. Marlow knew ; but there was one portion, summed up in a few words, he would like to hear again.

"Why, sir, while quite a child she was made to marry an old man ; but he died soon after coming home from church, so she was wife and widow in one day. Then the husband's brother cheated her out of her money. Since then she's been a teacher or something of that sort."

"Those who cheated her have died suddenly, and justice will at length be done," said Dr. Marlow, unable, as it seemed, to restrain his words. "My business here to-night is to communicate these glad tidings. Here's something to drink the young lady's health with. Good-night."

Dr. Marlow passed through a gate into a field ; and, pursuing a narrow path, came to the low wall of part of the garden which runs quite round the outer side of the Hospital. Here he met a little girl clad in a red cloak, and bearing a basket. She dropped a curtsy, and opened the gate for him.

"Can you tell me, my little maid," he asked, "where I shall find Mrs. Liston's rooms? Are they this side of the building?"

"Yes, sir. That's the sitting-room window where you see the strong light, and a great rose-tree across a part."

"Is Mrs. Hexham there?"

"Yes, sir. She's in there just now, to be a little quiet after the funeral : but she's staying with the matron."

"How shall I reach the rooms?"

"Through the archway there, sir. Then turn to your left in the cloisters. It is the second door. There's no mistaking it. There's a nice mat and a handsome knocker. The old lady loved everything about her to be beautiful."

When Dr. Marlow had thanked and rewarded the little maid, and seen her pass out into the growing shadows, an impulse seized him to look within the room. Reaching the window and pushing aside the leafless bough of an ancient rose-tree, he saw a picture which, in some respects, filled his soul with joy. In front of a brightly-burning fire, and beside a table on which stood a cup of tea, a lamp, small boxes and piles of old letters, sat Edith. He could not see her face, for it was turned to the fire, and bent down to a letter she was reading. It was evidently an old letter, and one

which recalled painful memories ; for presently, raising it to her lips, she burst into a passionate flood of tears. It had been written probably by her father, whom she had only loved too well.

One glimpse was enough. He hastened away to the cloister and to the second door. With difficulty—for twilight had now deepened into night—he made out the “handsome knocker,” and knocked. There came no reply, and he knocked again. Then, a faint “Come in” being said, he opened the door and entered. Probably thinking it was some accustomed person, Edith did not look up, so that Dr. Marlow had advanced to the table before she saw him. Then she rose, lifted up her hands in amazement, and uttered his name in a voice of terror.

“Do not be alarmed, Edith,” he said ; “and pardon the intrusion. But I am the bearer of most important news. Thomas Hughes was killed a few weeks ago in a drunken brawl. Since then, Thomas Hexham has been found dead in his bed ; and, dying intestate, Arthur is heir to the whole of the Betton property. Your marriage settlement and your husband’s will have also been found, and these secure you a handsome provision for life. All this information, so important to your interests, was telegraphed to Ireland and thence to London ; and I am here—a living telegram.”

She did not answer ; amazement had deprived her of speech. She was evidently not thinking of material fortune, but of him who stood before her.

“But far more to me by far,” he passionately said, as he took her hands in his, “is that I have learnt to-day that you were John Hexham’s wife but three hours,—a wife merely in name. Why not tell me this long before, when I sought your confidence and prompted you to tell me facts ? What pain you would have spared me ! what joy you would have given me !”

She bent down her beautiful face and wept upon his shoulder, murmuring as she did so, "I thought silence to be a duty. My marriage had been a matter of anguish to me, and of shame to others."

"Though never spoken distinctly in words, you must have known I immeasurably loved you. Every one saw it—even our poor Lord Donore. Edith, I have loved you tenderly ever since the night I first saw your sorrowful face in the picture-dealer's shop, and I now ask you to be my wife. I ought to have asked you months ago; but your companionship, as I foolishly and jealously imagined, with another man, whoever he might be, was repugnant to me, and stayed my tongue. You must forgive me my error, and let me atone."

She only pressed her beautiful face a little closer to his shoulder.

"We will be married at once," he said quietly, "and in the old town where your sorrows were endured. I will return there to-night, and with Mr. Palin arrange everything for our marriage, and your business and Arthur's also. We will return to London man and wife prior to accompanying our dear friend Miss Haller to Ireland, and thus, in a new bond of duty and affection, be more than ever parents to the children we love so well."

They sat down by the fire and talked over the strange events of the few last days, and confessed to each other their unspeakable joy and happiness. By-and-by a little white-capped, white-aproned maid—one of twenty-six children on the foundation of the Hospital—knocking at the door to say tea was ready, Miss M'Leod was sent for, in turn to be surprised with the account of events so strange and unexpected. Then the three repaired to the matron's room, in the main part of the building, and there, over the tea-table, arranged that Mrs. Hexham should remain a few days longer

at the Hospital, and as previously the guest of Miss M'Leod, till she could settle her mother's affairs. From thence she would remove to Mr. Palin's house ; Dr. Marlow, meanwhile, making every arrangement for the marriage.

He returned to the town that night ; and ten days after he and Edith were quietly married, in the presence of Miss M'Leod, Mr. Palin, and a few other valued friends.

As soon as Edith Hexham thus became Edith Marlow, this telegram was despatched to the Ladies Clare :—

“ We have been married to-day, and are very happy.”

Before their journey to London was begun, there to spend some days prior to returning to Ireland, the wire under sea and over land had flashed back this answer :—

“ We are greatly rejoiced. Come back to Castle Morr as soon as may be, for there a cordial Irish welcome awaits you both.”

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

FIFTEEN years have gone by since the events recorded in our story took place ; but the island in Lough Morr is as beautiful as ever, and the house thereon, long free from all traces of the great storm, is through the long summer, and oftentimes in winter, a source of never-failing delight to a new generation of children, as well as to some few of the old. New and more artistic tiles have been painted and burnt and placed on the walls ; new floors laid down. New furniture shows that the children of a later generation are more artistic in their carpentry ; for all things, if right instruction be given, go onward—from improvement to improvement on the march of time. Shrubs have grown into trees, rough stretches of grass into lawns of the fairest turf ; new flowers deck the garden beds—for, by a process which as yet we do not understand, the old is ever changing into the new, and the new into the old. The lakes still show their crystal waters, the woods are green, and the distant misty hills, in their mute loneliness, add subdued background to these enchanting landscapes of the western shores. Peace broods everywhere—and all is beautiful !

The Ladies Clare have long been dead : when their life's work of love and duty was accomplished, they soon passed away. Dr. and Mrs. Marlow, as representatives of Lord Donore's family, reside for the chief part of the year at

Castle Morr, though, each summer, taking a three months' Continental trip. They have six children of their own—four boys and two girls—the elder of whom form chiefly the generation which takes so great an interest in the island and the island-house. For Kathie and Lucy are still among them, though not for long ; for the former, now a rich Irish heiress, is soon to be married to Arthur Betton, who, a rising architect in London, is by his genius and practical skill greatly aiding a new development of the finest characteristics of Gothic architecture. Devellin, the Irish mason, has now become one of his foremost workmen—the one to whom he entrusts the carrying out and completion of his choicest designs. Walter Marlow holds a high post in the Civil Service in India ; and, lately married to Freda, has just returned there with her. Harold is an officer in Her Majesty's navy, Iole is married to one of Mr. Desmond's sons, and Lucy Marlow is engaged to another. The former, possessing much artistic taste and aptitude, greatly aids her husband in the suggestion and elaboration of designs for the improvement of the linen manufactures of Ireland. Terence Foyle, the needy student, loving learning and culture for their own intrinsic sake, has developed into an earnest, capable, thoughtful man. When his academic course was ended, he wisely accepted a subordinate post in Mr. Desmond's counting-house ; and, rising by degrees, and marrying one of his master's daughters, is now the partner in the house to whom is worthily entrusted all its more commercial transactions.

Residing almost constantly at Castle Morr, Dr. and Mrs. Marlow have wisely and fully interpreted the great powers so generously and confidently entrusted to their hands by the large-minded wealthy English duke whose ministers they are. The wretched and poverty-stricken inhabitants of the bogs and desolate hills and wastes have all been

gathered into village communities; and chapels, churches, schools, libraries, and temperance refreshment rooms are established in their midst. The girls are taught cooking, dairy and laundry work, and household management, and then drafted off to service; the boys trades, and farming, and fishing occupation, and then induced to face life and the world in whatsoever direction they please. Wrecking has thus all but disappeared, and smuggling also, from that rockbound coast; so that the crimes and tragic incidents of former years are now no more than thrilling stories for recital by the winter's fire. Fishing off the coast, and the curing and packing of the fish, in certain villages are fast developing a great industry. But more remarkable still are the pot-works of Castle Morr. Shadowed by forest glades, and placed on the picturesque upland which supplies granite and clays of several rare kinds, the brothers Tarra are producing ornamental works which already bear a name through the land. Tourists and connoisseurs alike come far to see a spot so beautiful and renowned; and thence carry away with them some cup, bowl, tazza, vase, plaque or other ornamental piece which combines in its form and design antique grace with the picturesque realism of modern art. Phineas Tarra is a great artist in his own walk—an Irish Luca della Robbia. He has travelled much; and the Etruscan vases enshrined in museums and great collections, the terra cottas of northern Italy, and the productions of the illustrious Englishman Wedgwood, have been before him, and not in vain. May the works of Tarra flourish long!

So also may the Children's Isle be green for years, its waters crystal, and its environments, without marring, show the freshness of nature and the changing seasons of the year! For the practical lessons learnt thereon, through many a happy hour, ennobled the lives of boys now

men, of girls now women ; and indirectly, through teaching and example, may ennoble the lives of generations of children yet to come.

“ There was a little lawny islet,
By anemone and violet,
Like mosaic, paven,
And its roof was flowers and leaves,
Which the summer's breath enweaves.
Where nor sun, nor shower, nor breeze,
Pierce the pines and trees,
Each a gem engraven.
Girt by many an azure wave,
With which the clouds and mountains pave
A lake's blue chasm.”

THE END.

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